

# THE DIVERTED VILLAGE

A HOLIDAY BOOK

BY

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AUTHOR OF

"THE WOOING OF SHEILA" AND "MARY DOMINIC"

WITH 32 ILLUSTRATIONS BY DOROTHY GAYN JEFFREYS

SECOND EDITION

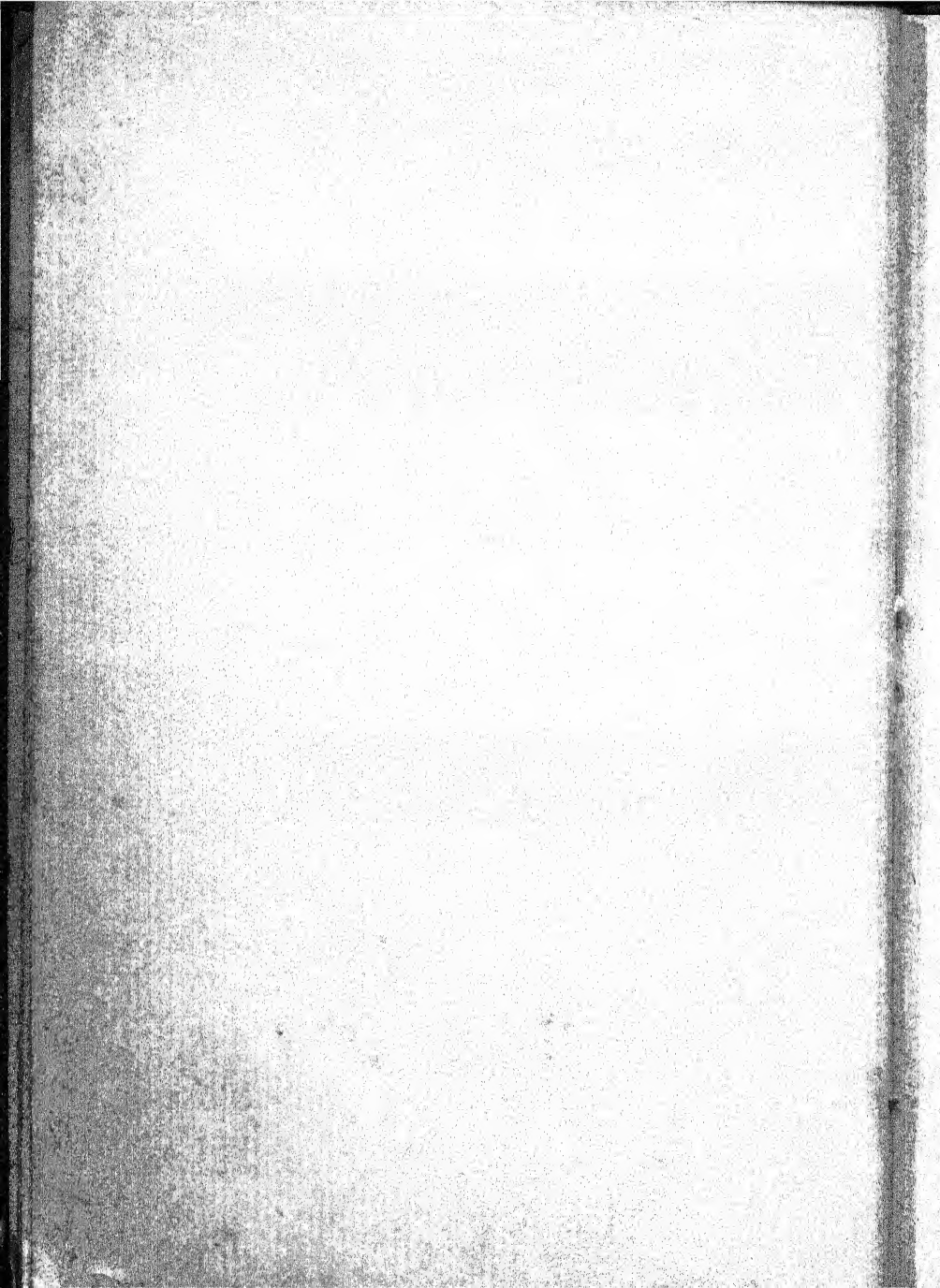
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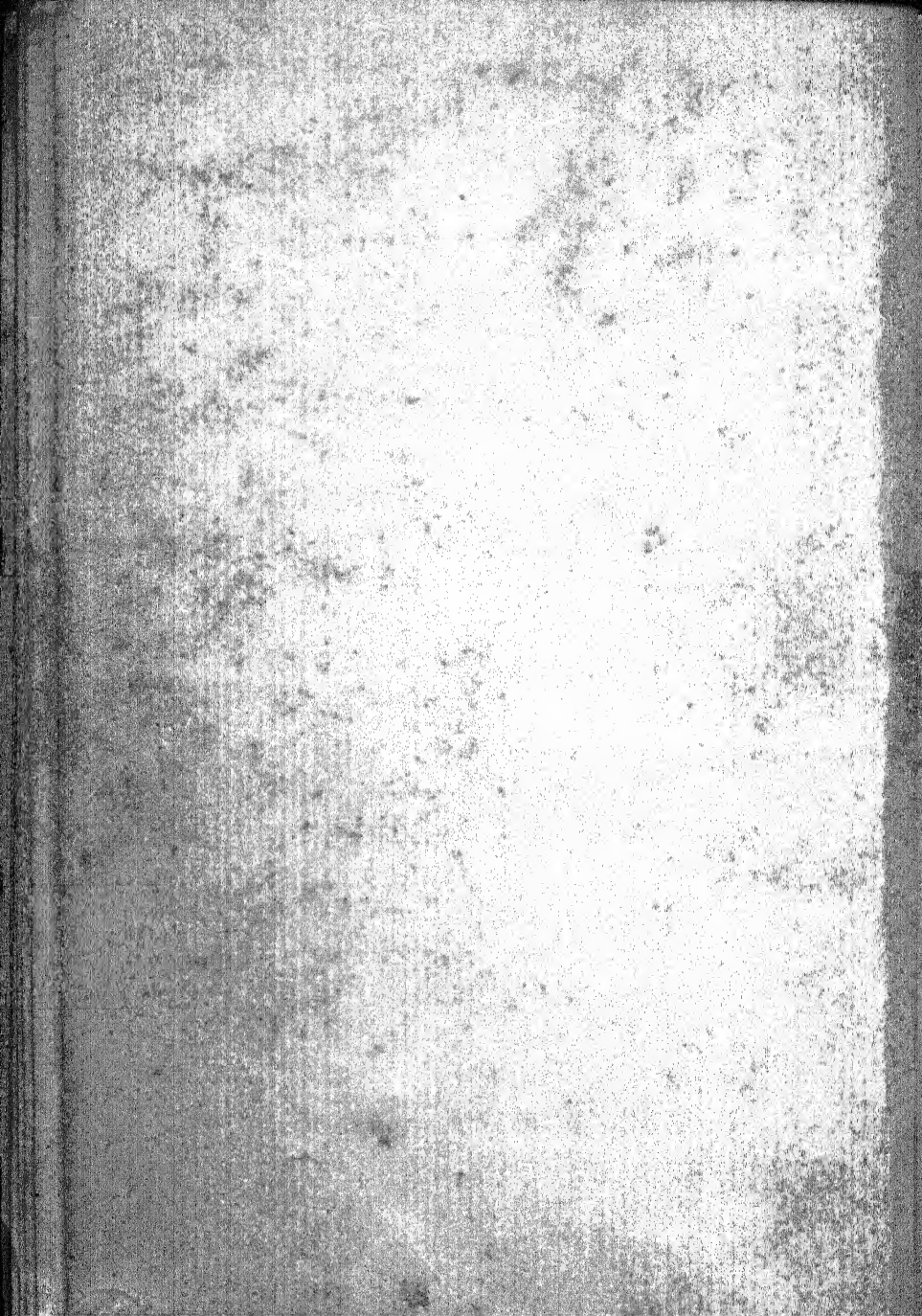
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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

"THE DIVERTED VILLAGE" is a holiday book, written during a holiday, and in a holiday mood; and I am told that so unpretending a title-page would be overweighted by the appearance upon it of three names, representing two authors and one artist. For this reason only, the name of one of the collaborators has been at the last moment omitted; but the wise reader will no doubt be shrewd enough to discover for himself that here is the work of two people, writing together under light-hearted conditions.

G. R.





# THE DIVERTED VILLAGE

## CHAPTER I

### WHY EVE BLUSHED

THERE never was a garden like ours, and there never will be again. We did not know much about gardens or gardening; but when we saw it, we <sup>became red in the face</sup> ~~blushed~~—that is, Eve blushed.

There was nothing original about the site of the garden or the shape of the garden. It was the state of the garden that was so unique, and the effect that it had on the adjacent village.

We had anticipated it as a thing of delight, but the village (and a village has a conscience, just as a country has one) had long looked upon it with a sense of edification, mingled

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with natural humour. Our appearance on the scene, which to us seemed an important event, was but an episode in the history of the garden and the village.

Our struggle with the garden and its natural lord, which we thought to be in our own interest, was really, the village considered, a slight alleviation of its cares, and a passing midsummer entertainment.

But I must explain how we came by the garden and the house of Leys. The fact is, house and garden both were a <sup>bequest</sup> legacy. Aunt Agnes, who left the legacy to Eve, had for some years previously given up occupying either, and shown a decided preference for Kensington. Thanks to the extraordinary dispositions of her regent in Leysham, the garden, on our arrival, showed all the symptoms of that garden of the sluggard, which Dr. Watts long ago held up to public odium.

We had little idea of what was before us on that first of June, when we set out to take

## WHY EVE BLUSHED

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possession of Eve's legacy; the recollection of town cares and responsibilities was still upon the road with us, as our three carriage-loads drew nearer to the village of Leysham.

As Eve and I listened to the sound of the wheels and saw the clouds of June dust raised by our passage, the migration appeared to us as monstrous and formidable as any trekking in history, Dutch or Israelitish.

It was not so much the human bulk of our convoy as its prodigious vitality which alarmed us and seemed to threaten the balance of that awful rule that Eve and I felt to be ours by divine right.

For weeks past we had been speculating on the new field for energy that Aunt Agnes's cottage would provide. Now, as we looked at the waggonette that followed next behind our own, it appeared to us that all Norfolk would hardly be wide enough for our peace. On the box seat, beside the grinning driver, a small boy without a hat was indulging in a harlequin-



## 4 THE DIVERTED VILLAGE

ade. Within the body of the vehicle a black head was bobbing rebelliously up and down to the music of an interrupted psalm and a succession of French shrieks intended to be repressive. The equipage that brought up the rear looked like a moving ark. Two female forms were wedged in the interstices of the baggage, and from it came a melancholy piping like that of a fiend hid in a cloud.

In this state we rounded a corner.

"Leysham village, ma'am," said the driver, pointing with his whip.

It may have been only fancy, but it certainly seemed to me that Eve here assumed a more majestic port.

In a very few minutes we had turned in at the gate of an emerald-green drive that a stretch of healthy-looking meadow overlapped. As we approached the ivy-covered house, we saw in the background a wondrous rank of pale yellow blossoms against a pathetic saffron sky.

Ever since receiving the news of her legacy

Eve had been given to talking about Aunt Agnes and her family and roses, and so on—all which things I received with a humbled mind.

Now, as these were blossoms which I at least did not remember to have seen before, I turned to Eve.

"I suppose," I said respectfully, "those are spiregias?"

"No," answered Eve severely; "those, I imagine, are cabbage blossoms."

For once I was prudent and looked away, but not so quickly as to avoid seeing a dilatation of crimson on the cheek of Eve.



## CHAPTER II

### A PARTICULAR DESCRIPTION OF MRS. TURT

A STRANGE thing was that the state of the house did not at all correspond with the state of the garden. Outside, the green wilderness reminded one of nothing so much as the premises of the Sleeping Beauty. But the person within was not beautiful nor asleep.

The first view we got of Mrs. Turt was a back view. The good woman was a little troubled with deafness, so that when we got into the hall, she was on her knees in a dark corner, apparently looking for spiders.

But she was up again in a moment, and came forward, carefully wiping her hands upon her apron. We found afterwards that this was one

## DESCRIPTION OF MRS. TURT 7

of her peculiarities. Like Gideon's fleece, her hands and her very long wrists were for ever



being wetted and dried unexpectedly. It was extraordinary to us how her hands as hands could survive such treatment. Anyone would

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have thought that they ought to have been worn away long ago. But they seemed only to flourish the more; for so soon as she had curtsied all round the hall she insisted on shaking hands with us, her face beaming with good humour, her large black bonnet tilted over one eye.

Eve was delighted. She said it seemed like a real welcome home, and that she remembered Mrs. Turt quite well from twenty years ago, and that she believed it was the very same bonnet.

Mrs. Turt was an orderly soul. Unfortunately she had a crooked eye. The first thing we noticed when we had got into the hall was that all the pictures were hung askew. But everything was as neat as possible and perfectly shone with cleanliness.

Mrs. Turt took us at once upstairs and down. We soon found that she was afflicted with an intermittent nod. About every fourth sentence her head went suddenly to one side with a jerk.

## DESCRIPTION OF MRS. TURT 9

This alarmed us at first, but when we had once thoroughly got to know Mrs. Turt we would not have had her different.

As we went through the rooms—and there was a blue room and a green room and a red room—we discovered that they were all so many successive shrines to Mrs. Turt. She was an old servant of Aunt Agnes, and plainly identified herself with every most obsolete object in the house. She had dusted them all in her youth and intended to go on dusting them while she had breath. From the gilt bows that adorned every prominence of the drawing-room furniture and that looked like a golden Cupid's cravats, to the sacred pictures executed in Berlin wool that hung on the landing upstairs, every thing was to her not only delightful in itself, but memorial as well. Later on, we were to find the inconvenience of this attitude; every alteration and improvement that Eve and I were to make was made in mortal fear of what Mrs. Turt would think.

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When we had been all over the house, we paused for a minute on the top landing, a pleasant place with its polished floor, wide window, and low window-seat. From the window could be seen an immense extent of Norfolk landscape, large fields stretching away, line upon line, into a mere vague distant flatness, out of which rose a number of church towers. Above was an enormous sky, wide and high, with a bed of clouds, very broken and of a brilliant white; "like a crowd of angels tumbling together," said Penelope at once.

Below was the garden—a contrast, in its wild disarray, with the prim state and dignity of the house within.

"How is it, Mrs. Turt," said Eve, "that the garden is in this state?"

Mrs. Turt stood nursing her elbows, a look of significance on her face. She always talked as if her mouth was full of brown paper; and what she said can very well go into the next chapter.



### CHAPTER III

#### THE REST OF THE LEGACY

“**H**OW is it, Mrs. Turt,” said Eve, “that the garden has come to be in this state?”

Mrs. Turt's head jerked, and her bonnet went about. She turned her shoulder to the window, hugged her elbows tighter than ever, and speaking in her peculiar way with the back of her nose—

“I cawn't abear to look at it,” she said. “I never do talk, ma'am, and never will, and what go on out o' doors is no concern of mine. But with all that lumber under my very nose, I might as well make believe to take no notice of the day of judgment. And as for them people in the village . . . !”



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Mrs. Turt was a Hertfordshire woman. She had married a Leysham man : maid and matron, she had lived in Leysham fifty years ; but fifty years is a mere bagatelle in pure rustic tradition, and Mrs. Turt still talked of "them people in the village."

Mrs. Turt took a good breath and then went on again. She talked at a great rate, and with very little trouble to herself, if not to her hearers, as most of her consonants were left out.

"I cawn't abear to think of it, and I never do talk, ma'am ; but such goings-on as has been seen with that there Tummus Matt and them people in the village would draw language from a stone wall. I beg your pardon, sir. Well, *as I was sayin'*, this is how it came to be. Oh dare, oh dare, I cawn't abear to think of it. Five weeks it were before Miss Armstrong went away, never to return no more. 'Tummus Matt,' said she, incautious-like, 'that sallery's not 'arthed up ; no, not

## THE REST OF THE LEGACY 13

enough by four inches.' She fair doted on sallery, did my poor lady. 'Beggin' your



pardon, ma'am,' Tummus, he say, 'I know my trade; that sallery is in the right 'arth; no

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more and no less.' 'Tummus Matt,' say my poor lady; but there," said Mrs. Turt, putting her apron to her eyes, "I cawn't abear to be speakin' her words after her, now she's gone. Anyhow, speak she did, round and sober, as she was used. And Tummus, he were struck dumb. And Miss Armstrong, she turn herself about, and back into the house with her. And Tummus Matt, he do declare, the silly old man, that that very minute his heart bruk. He left his spade into the 'arth, and home he went, saying he would never work more for Miss Armstrong. And no more he did. And there you can see that very spade in the tool-house now; there have a many been to look at it. And Tummus Matt, he have suffered terrible in his mind. And in the airly mornin' he have been seen to come about, and look to the roses. He fair dote upon roses, do Tummus Matt. And nobody in the village do dare to take up his job; and Tummus Matt, he will not say whether he will work for yous or no, and

## THE REST OF THE LEGACY 15

there's nobody that do know, for he do keep his mind to hisself."

While our attention hung upon the narrative of Mrs. Turt, our dismayed eyes were busily scanning the scene of this episode from the open window.

The garden was one whose intention assorted very ill with so ragged a disorder. It was strictly formal in design, and planned to carry out the lines of the house, which was set down square in its midst, like one of Miss Kate Greenaway's Queen Annetique cottages.

Figure to yourselves, you who have heard of formal gardening, the double-trellised fence (called by Aunt Agnes a pergola), designed to keep the roses from the cabbages; the lawn and the shrubberies; the straight paths; the mathematical rhyme, if I may so express it, preserved between the flower-beds—a round one echoed and repeated by a round one, a square by a square.

The whole garden sloped by an almost im-

## 16 THE DIVERTED VILLAGE

perceptible Norfolk gradient to the road, where a wild, quickset hedge, with a gap or two in its lower rim, served as a screen to the passing village.

There was a lawn that had been used for croquet. But the crop of meadow grass upon it was full three feet high, and a mole had made his main run in the hither end. The lawn and the shrubberies were on the right side of the house; the rosary was before the door. The kitchen garden was on the left of the house, and made a disposition of itself towards the rear, where it encountered the stable-yard.

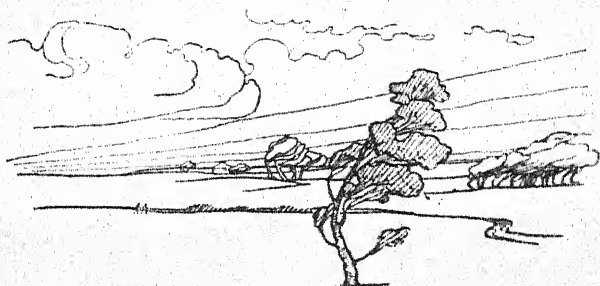
Into this neat design Nature had now entered, and in gardens, as in cities, Nature is an anarchist. The house was smothered in ivy and long-legged, unhappy roses. In the borders pansies, the tallest ever seen, with small, starved faces, struggled to look over the shoulders of trees of groundsel. Brilliant poppies, large and small, flourished all over



## THE REST OF THE LEGACY 17

the gravel walks, and pretty well everywhere. Shrubs and hedges were run so wild that the distant, well-kept fields, and the whole prim Norfolk landscape, appeared garden-like by contrast.

The rest of the scenery consisted in the sea, whose long blue line was visible from the lawn.



Although it was almost a mile from the garden gate, the noise of it could conveniently be heard from the house—a formidable rumbling—twice a day at high tide, and the effects of it were everywhere to be seen in the price of vegetables and the native complexion.



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In my description of the legacy I must not leave out the wind, which had accompanied us upon the road, careered through every room in the house, and finally emerged upon the lawn, ready for anything.

This kind of wind is peculiar to Norfolk. We never really appreciated its peculiarities until we went to church. There we soon observed that the Norfolk wind can contrive to blow a gale during the psalms, fall into a dead calm for second lesson, shift four points of the compass in the course of the Litany, and finally blow a hurricane from the opposite quarter during the sermon. In consequence the trees of the neighbourhood have an uncommonly tortured look. Their foliage is always dishevelled, and, like Lot's wife, they are always staring in one direction.

Eve is anxious that I should include the Norfolk skies in my description of the scenery. She tells me they have breadth, light, colour, and movement. But all that was invented

## THE REST OF THE LEGACY 19

years ago by the painters of the Norfolk Broads. And so far as I am a judge, the Norfolk skies have simply been indefinitely reproducing their pictures ever since.

## CHAPTER IV

MIKE, PENELOPE, POLYPHEMUS, EVE,  
AND I

**A**PENSIVE interest was lent to our retreat into the country by Eve's concern for the state of Mike's health. We are very proud of Mike. He is one of those children who—although like other boys he may have his hideous moments—are unsurpassed in what we may call deportment ; and I defy any parent to produce a child with a more startling vocabulary. It was Mike who in his infancy invented the hodge-egg and the wooden cuckoo. It was Mike who early wondered how the wasp managed to hold on to his stomach. It was Mike who invented the paper-bird who came every evening out of the nursery cupboard to eat paper and look sadly out of window.

## MIKE, PENELOPE, AND OTHERS 21

Eve believes firmly, and I agree in this, that Aunt Agnes's legacy is a consequence of Mike's appearance in miniature, enclosed in a letter which spoke of his beautiful golden hair. (N.B.—Aunt Agnes was always noted for her extraordinary resemblance to Queen Elizabeth.) Thus we considered it a touching coincidence that Mike should be conducted thither, the victim of his own vocabulary.

It was when Mike had completed his ninth year that he first began to drop into five syllables. I used to want to cuff him, but Eve always said, "Let him alone, poor boy. He is only getting used to the language. Once he knows a word, he always drops it. It's the same thing that makes him want to hang head downward from every fence-railing he comes across." For some time I patiently endured hearing ancient and forgotten particles of the English language served up in a hash every morning at breakfast. But it was quite another thing when Mike announced that his "constitution" was a "faded

## 22 THE DIVERTED VILLAGE

rag." Eve was seriously concerned when on her inviting him to partake of a baked egg he replied: "I have a superstitious horror of eggs cooked in that manner. I will never be a contributor to such a beastly dish." And when one warm spring day Mike refused his dinner, remarking serenely, "The sun is an uproarious thief; he has stolen my blessed appetite," Eve sent on the spot for Dr. Kilmanschield, who recommended no lessons and out of doors.

As this verdict coincided with the legacy in a remarkable way, and also with a little disappointment of my own, of which I hope to say more later on, we felt that the finger of fate had quite clearly pointed our way. Mike's books were forcibly removed from him; he was bidden to use words of one syllable only; he was presented with a new cricket bat, a fishing rod, and a pair of boxing gloves; to the openly expressed satisfaction of Penelope, who had been made to feel her inferiority in the matter of language.

## MIKE, PENELOPE, AND OTHERS 23

As for Penelope, she is a born brat. A tolerably good-looking brat, if you will, with meek needle-and-thread interludes that fortunately impose upon her relatives, but still a



brat. It was Penelope who found out a new method of stripping wall-paper from the walls, *i.e.* by wetting the paper first with a soaped sponge before proceeding to remove the integument with the aid of a tooth-brush. It was



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Penelope who sampled the jam-pots in the larder when we were all at church with the same corkscrew. But for all that the child has, as I said before, her interludes. The Penelope who reads and thinks, who looks for angels in the clouds, and remarks on how many great things her little eye can gather in, is not the same as the Penelope who eats like an ostrich, and rages like a Turk, and peppers made-moiselle's bread-and-butter at unlucky moments.

Upon my word, now I come to think of it, Penelope deserves a chapter to herself.

## CHAPTER V

### PENELOPE

**I**T was Penelope who, with a pair of scissors, cut a zigzag pattern in Polyphemus's tail. "Elle n'a pas peur," says mademoiselle. If you could see Polyphemus's tail you would know what this disaster meant. Polyphemus's tail was, after Mike's hair, the pride of the family. Then Polyphemus is otherwise and altogether so beautiful. His eyes (for he has both) are large and green and pensive, and his disposition is aristocratic and urbane. He continually forgets that he is a tom—a Persian tom of unusual size—and still goes sprawling, four legs together, after butterflies and beetles. What Eve declares to be his most darling propensity is to hug his hind legs and his nose all up together in his arms when he sleeps.

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His appearance in this attitude is so alluring that it proves a snare to the softer parts of the family, including Mike: then it is that they indulge in an objectionable rite which consists in suddenly embracing the adored animal, and howling or chanting forth an idiot litany. Even our sterling Popay has been caught kissing him; at least, so Penelope says.

As for mademoiselle, she remarks openly that he is a folly, and she talks excessively to him in her own charming tongue. Mademoiselle is our superior Norman maid. Her duties are endless, and they are all religiously performed, for mademoiselle is both *dévouée* and *dévoté*. She is, indeed, a deeply religious person; her dispositions are so fixed towards heaven that the smaller virtues of this world are occasionally neglected. One of her peculiarities is that whenever she sees anything which she happens to like she instinctively lays hold of it.

Eve tells me the things she likes best are

things with mother-of-pearl on them, or anything with a silk lining. It seems she has



quite a collection. Yesterday I heard Eve ask in her firmest voice for her mother-of-pearl

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folding scissors. "Oui, madame," answered mademoiselle in a tone of religious resignation, "je les ai pour vous." "But," objected Eve, with mildness, "this is the fifth time; and you know that I wish to keep them for myself." "It is true, madame. I confess it. But these little scissors so chaste. Oh, la la! C'est une folle! Que voulez vous? Je suis faite comme cela. Do you not know what they say of us Normans?

"Les Normans ont les mains crochues :  
C'est pour mieux ramasser tout."

I looked up. Mademoiselle's nimble hands were spread before Eve; her solid shoulders were shrugged up to her ears; her mild blue eyes, which are habitually cast downwards in the mechanical doll modesty of the French *jeune fille*, were now turned, in an ecstasy of fatalism, up to heaven.

That was yesterday. Eve has not yet got her scissors.

But now to the garden.



## CHAPTER VI

### THE APPLE ON THE THORN

ON the very day after our arrival Eve and I were let suddenly into the secret of village opinion on the subject of our garden.

Towards evening we were walking up and down the Broad Walk, which was now almost as verdant as the neighbouring shrubberies. Eve was just remarking that gravel appeared to be a better basis than clay for the propagation of many garden plants, when we were struck by the pungent perfume of the herb *Nicotiana*, as commonly consumed in the clay pipe of the Norfolk rustic.

This led Eve, who has a disproportionate perception of the whereabouts of this plant, to turn her head, and me to follow her example. There we saw in the lower interspaces among

### 30 THE DIVERTED VILLAGE

the roots of a quickset hedge sundry bobbing objects, like something, I forget what precisely, in *Gulliver's Travels*. This phenomenon made a sudden disappearance, and was as suddenly repeated.

My first instinct in these cases is to look away; but Eve, who is bolder and more scientific, steadied her gaze as one who is determined to know what there was to be known, and her gaze never conjured more successfully than on this occasion. Suddenly one partial gap was vacated, and there appeared above the hedge a rosy face, like a red apple stuck upon a thorn.

The face was that of an old white-whiskered man, but the expression of jocund gaiety belonged to an earlier, more idyllic day than ours.

"Gud evenin'," said he joyously. "I'd hared tell yew was come." As he spoke he flipped up a forefinger at intervals by way of respectful punctuation.

## THE APPLE ON THE THORN 31

"Good evening," we answered graciously, and both together.

"I'd a knowed ye!" said the Apple. "Yew be the vera moral o' her that be gone. That were a vera noice leddy, that were. But a trifle partickler, as old maids be. Her didn't allers get on with we: we be very independunt people in this vellage, we be. Yes, marm, we be so.

"I be vourscore and dree years, I be: an' I never see sich a sight o' weeds in a garden anywhere as there be growin' here. That be enough to smother the parish, there, that be. I seed a turmit big as a harse over yonter: well, to be deed: the gard'ner, that be a very gud gard'ner too: he tell me he wunnot can come to do your gard'n, not this week: no, nor the week after. Nor do anybody know will he be comin' at all. Well, to be deed: 'twull be a gud thing when he do have them weeds up. I be vourscore and dree years old, an I never see so many weeds as there

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be in that there gard'n of yourn. Gud e'en to yer."

And the red Apple disappeared from the Thorn. Eve and I stood and stared at each other. This was not at all the sort of thing we had expected.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE PHLEGMATIC VILLAGE

THE phenomenon of the bobbing heads was wholly explained next day, when we took a walk through the village. "Was there ever so neat a village?" said Eve, pausing under a parasol. "As mademoiselle would say, it is drawn out on four pins." As far as we could see, every little mathematical house had its own little mathematical garden. The houses were built of round flints collected on the seashore, assorted in colours, and neatly stuck in mortar, or a kind of Norfolk mud. Every cottage window was full of flowers. Roses climbed on the house walls. Every garden had its borders packed with bloom, and its beds full of cabbages and other vegetables



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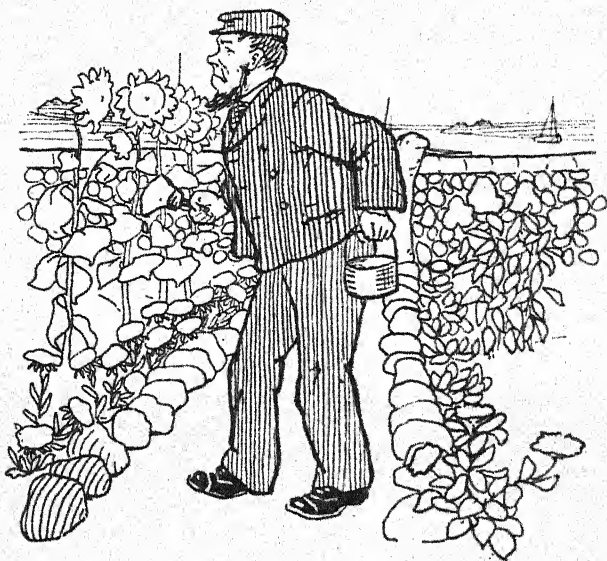
exactly like those sold in children's toy boxes. In the whole village there was not one weed.

Some of the gardens were further adorned with aggravating rows of brilliantly white-washed stones. As we passed one cottage a coastguard, in a square blue jacket, raised himself up, the more conveniently to observe us as we went by. On one side of him was a pail, on the other a row of glaring stones, very neat. He was engaged in touching up this fetish with a whitewash brush. Allowing for a melancholy black beard, his brush and his expression were precisely those of the right-hand gardener who is painting the rose tree in *Alice in Wonderland*.

Except for this coastguard and an occasional eye at a window-pane, the village might have been empty of inhabitants. All the promiscuous company there was to be had was probably preparing for its evening gravitation towards our quickset hedge. There the spectacle of the one neglected garden, and that a quality

## THE PHLEGMATIC VILLAGE 35

one, seemed to have power to loosen their tongues, and provide the necessary stimulus to enable them to discuss other topics.



Such a position of affairs was so different from that ideal seigneurial influence which Eve had expected to exercise, that I observed it was with some difficulty that she succeeded in swallowing her discomfiture and the phlegmatic villagers.

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Our errand on this afternoon was to look for a substitute for Aunt Agnes's hypothetical gardener. We had been advised to make our inquiries at the post office, which served also as the village emporium. We had to address the woman in charge across a double file of glass jars, filled with the most delicious-looking sweetmeats, which, like the fruit on the trees in the tale of "Aladdin's Wonderful Lamp," were of every conceivable colour, and equally calculated to inflame the imagination of youth. Having with difficulty withdrawn my attention from those delightful jars (they were about forty in number, and no doubt were to prove equally deadly with the jars in "Ali Baba"), I at once perceived that all Eve's persuasiveness was wasted upon the tidy woman in office.

"A gardener, ma'am ; well, ma'am, Tummus Matt, he do the garden at The Leys, always. He won't have nobuddy else to go there and meddle. There be none idle in this village to go and take up another man's job. Every

## THE PHLEGMATIC VILLAGE 37

man here do have his own job, and that be Tummus Matt's."

"Yes, but why doesn't he come to do it?" said Eve, with a smile.

The woman regarded Eve with an unmoved face, and an eye that keenly scanned the ingredients of her costume.

"Tummus Matt, he will come, sure enough, when he do make up his mind. Tummus always do come to his own job. He will be there, ma'am, Tummus will, one of these mornin's."

"Now, what is to be done?" said Eve on our way home.

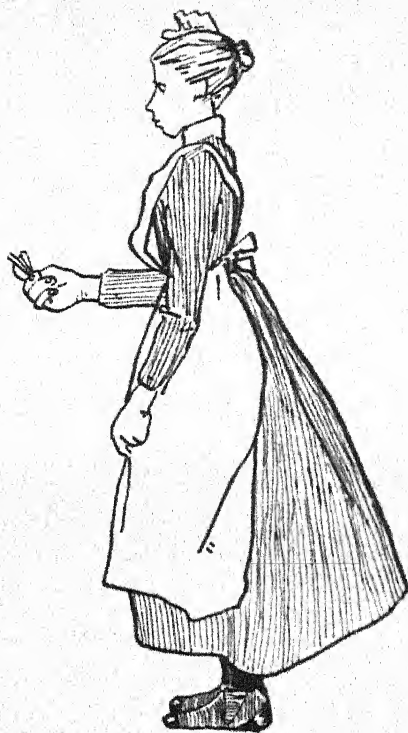
## CHAPTER VIII

### POPAY

ANOTHER village complication was due to our own maid Popay. Popay was Leysham born and bred. Eight years before she had been bestowed upon us by Aunt Agnes, a plump maiden of seventeen, neat, stolid, complacent—the very epitome, as we were now to discover, of the phlegmatic village she came from. Her aprons were as shining white as the white stones of the village gardens. Her smooth pink cheeks were village roses. Her honest, immovable countenance might be taken as symbolic of the closed village doors and the closed village mouths. Not that Popay is destitute of understanding—far from it. There are times when a thought almost rises to the surface behind her pale blue eyes like a fish



in a pool or a face in the village window-panes.  
Like the village faces, Popay's thoughts never



properly look out; but Eve says they are  
certainly there.

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As soon as we were well arrived, Eve thought of getting everything as usual from Shoolbred's. Popay thought otherwise. She went down to the village shop and ordered in whatever in the way of comestibles she thought would increase the importance of her family in the eyes of the village. Curious luxuries: pallid bacon that nearly suggested pig; Yarmouth bloater paste of great age and fuliginous appearance; jam, so solidified that its top paper had become confounded, and an edible dainty; village tea of that ancient Chinese flavour that we detest; coffee that made milk obnoxious. We underwent them all.

For here let it be stated that Eve has long raised upon her hearth an altar to Household Peace. One of her theories is that the ill feeling of even a scullery maid can travel upstairs and infect a whole house. Another is that nobody can be happy unless they have space in which to express themselves. Therefore she allows Mike and Penelope to scour the

country roads in bare legs, and go without pudding when they are in the first frenzy of a Spartan revival. She allows mademoiselle to button her boots and run after her with cushions, and she allows Popay an agreeable freedom in the choice of recipes and aides-de-camp.

The resulting attachments to the person of Eve are very differently expressed. Mademoiselle's bursts from her in torrents of eloquence. Popay's is expressed in a steady adherence like that of a rustic bur. When mademoiselle is asked to do anything, she is all action. "Oui, madame," she cries, "je file comme une étoile!" The result is not to be reckoned with; it will be according to the fantasy of mademoiselle. When Popay is applied to, she utters a scarcely audible duosyllable, moves slowly on her way, and the thing is done.

When Penelope, on a private raid, jammed her hand in the neck of a Chinese jar and

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could by no means be released, mademoiselle's exclamations and gestures were all that could be desired, but did not tend to a practical remedy. As for Popay, she turned from her work, and with one deft blow of the kitchen poker cracked the jar, thereby releasing the howling Penelope, upon whom she did not trouble to bestow so much as a second glance. Mademoiselle thereupon carried off the victim, embracing her, and crying, "Ah, mon Dieu ! pauv' p'tite chérie ! Quelle déception pour elle !" thereby *arracher-ing* to herself all the glory of the transaction.

Popay abhorred illness ; she was gloomy if we caught cold, and blank and intolerable when Mike had measles. But mademoiselle was in sickness truly *dévouée* ; she was never so happy as when she could sit up all night and make *tisanes*, and wake us up at unnecessary and unnatural hours to say the patient was sleeping like an angel.

Mademoiselle loved gaiety and a full house ;

Popay hated guests and, as a rule, calmly sulked all through their visits. Probably it was because of Sunday-school memories that she was so civil and pleasant when the Rector came to dinner a few chapters further on.



## CHAPTER IX

### THOMAS MATT

**I**T is time we returned to the garden.

As Thomas Matt did not appear by the end of the first week, and as the village independence of spirit did not permit of its providing anyone who would undertake what was Thomas Matt's immemorial "job," Eve sent word that she would not now require his attendance. At the same time she ordered a gardener (I believe from Shoolbred's) to come the following Tuesday.

On Monday morning, when I came down to breakfast, to find Eve divided between the coffee-pot and the morning post, Mike suddenly remarked: "What is that bald-eyed man doing in the garden? I went out and asked

him who he was, and he said, 'I be Tummus Matt.'"



Eve stared at me and I stared at Eve ; Mike, profiting by the diversion he had created, appropriated the largest egg.

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"You had better go out and speak to the man," said Eve, basely entrenching herself behind the coffee-pot. "It is really too bad of him. He cannot possibly be allowed to stay. We have put the cottage ready for the other gardener."

When I was got into the garden I found Thomas Matt engaged in mowing the cabbage bed, while delicate yellow cauliflower blossoms and turnip blooms lay in swathes about him. When I accosted him he ceased from his labours; reversing his scythe he leaned upon the stock, and adjusted himself for conversation.

Thomas Matt was built on the most perfect rustic plan: his legs were bowed; his back was broad; his face seemed to be rather made up of expressive patches of colour—greys and browns and dull reds—than of features properly so called: and he had the eye and the underhung lip of the lobster.

That eye and that lip were too much for me:

I had meant to reproach him, but I was soon made aware that I was as a child before Thomas.

"Mar'n', sir," he began; "dry weather."

"Not too dry for the weeds, it seems," said I, wishing to meet him on his own ground. (Mem. to Eve: Meet a gardener on his own ground. A tolerable proverb.)

"Umph!" said Thomas Matt; "the weed be very tight to get up these dry morn'n's. 'Tull cost ye a pretty penny the more if it do keep so dry."

"Well, that is it, Thomas. The mistress thought it would be as well to save you the harder part of the work, and as she was getting afraid you would not come——"

"I be always sure to come at t'end of ut; and here I be."

"Yes, but, Thomas . . . I think the mistress has . . ."

"I be come to stay," said Thomas, fixing me with his eye.

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I cast about in my mind for a way out of the predicament, and meanly decided that, after all, it was Eve's affair.

"It's rather a poor soil about here, I fancy."

"Poor soil!" and Thomas grinned at me. "Miss Armstrung, she take care of that. Reck'n the soil be so good as — can make it." (I must look up this word, or ask the Rector: some of these old Norfolk words are so biblical.) "Anyhows the 'arth in this parish be so good as any in Norfolk, and Norfolk soil be the best in the British domin—ions."

Lest this should give a mistaken impression of Thomas Matt's fluency, let me say that he produced each word with as much circumstance as though it were a spadeful of earth.

"It grows fine weeds certainly," said I, trying to hold my ground.

"The better the soil," answered Thomas, "the higher the weed. It took nigh on three year to grow that lumber; 'tull take ten, I reckon, ta get it out. I know this soil, and this



soil know me. Ye can't treat this soil in a horry. It'll cost ye a fair sight o' money to put it to rights. When this er good soil do go wrong, it be like a good harse that be druv asquance."

"But why, Thomas," said I, "was it let run to neglect like this?"

Thomas Matt slowly unhitched himself from his scythe, solemnly reversed it, and made a feint at a six-foot cabbage. Then he paused, applied himself primitively to his toilet, and then at last he spoke.

"Ow," he said, "that be a severe question. But that were all Miss Armstrung's faut. She right upset me. An' I be a man o' my word. What I say I do be stick to. An' I say I never should work more for Miss Armstrung. No more I never did. It were only nat'ral the pore old lady took on after me. I were raal bad in me mind auver it . . . what I done. I had no taste for me vittles at all when I h'ard t' old lady were gun, seein' 'twere me druv her out o' the

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place. If she had agone on livin' in Leysham, she might a' been hearty to this day."

Thomas Matt's eyes were nearly starting out of his head with feeling. I tried to console him, but he evidently preferred to go on hugging his remorse and his self-importance. To my further suggestions that he needed repose and that he had better allow a younger man to take his place, he turned a deaf ear. As I watched him imperturbably resuming his mowing, it seemed to me that any effort of mine to dislodge him would be made in vain. There was nothing for it but to retreat into the house.

"Well?" said Eve.

"Well," said I, "I think you had better go and talk to Thomas Matt."

Eve went out with a derisive look directed at me—a look which very well became her white-and-lilac morning-gown. In about a quarter of an hour she came back, her face flushed, and proceeded to fill up a telegraph form. The telegram was, I fancy, to Shoolbred's.

## CHAPTER X

### POLYPHEMUS AND THE THRUSH

DO not suppose that all this while Polyphemus had been idle. He had been carefully and delicately exploring his new domain, finding out the best-cushioned chair indoors, and out of doors seeking the finest exposure for his nappings. His first tour of inspection was made in the arms of Penelope, whom he adored, although her way of lugging him about without the slightest sense of his anatomy ought to have estranged his affections long ago. The pair in this equation recalled the fable of the unfortunate boy who began by carrying a calf, and went on carrying it till it grew into a bull ; for Polyphemus, if you included his fur (which was a kind of glorified tabby with sunset effects), was not much inferior

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in bulk to Penelope, and some part of him always overflowed from her embrace and hung down most uncomfortably. Yet if you looked into his face, his expression was still seraphic, with that look of blinking beatitude which is only to be seen in cats or the angels of Perugini.

There was one very close bond between Penelope and Polyphemus. They both preferred the same doll. When Polyphemus could not come by the lap of Penelope, he found consolation in Agnes. Agnes was large, fair-haired, and stiff-jointed, with an idiotic smile. She was for ever being discovered seated in different places all over the house, with some part of Polyphemus occupying the horizontal districts of her person.

Mike had discovered in a tattered book with a green-and-gold binding that cats could only grow attached to places, and not to people; and we were half afraid that on the first slight or fit of indigestion he would break for home. But

## POLYPHEMUS AND THRUSH 53

whether it was that Penelope so weightily plied him with bread and milk, or (as we believe) he loved us, and not our domicile, he showed himself from the first contented with The Leys, its garden, and preserves so well stocked with game in the way of beetles and butterflies.

But in this paradise a snake was soon to reveal itself. The walls of the cottage were in places overgrown with ivy; in this a pair of thrushes had built a nest, taking leave in the long-untenanted state of the house. Polyphemus was delighted when he made out their establishment. The day after his arrival he was to be seen craning out of every window in turn, looking for a good view. The next day Penelope deposed to having seen him hanging from the gutter by two hind legs. The following night the house was awakened from its second sleep by a hideous fracas. Polyphemus was scrambling about in the ivy, crying at the top of his voice. Two infuriated thrushes were flying round the house, screaming



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and dabbling at Polyphemus every time they passed him. The pigeons were bursting out of the dovecot, and the sparrows were chattering on the roof. Polyphemus's shrieks grew more agonising as the cock thrush dived at him. Overcome with terror, he missed his hold in the uncertain ivy, and suddenly fell smash on to the gravel below. Looking up to heaven in a maze that such a cruel fate should have overtaken him, he was gratified to see that every window of the upper story was garnished with a ruffled and staring head. Beholding such a prospect of sympathy, Polyphemus redoubled his cries, and lay sprawling. In an instant the least honourable among the heads vanished, and there was a stampede for the front door. There is no doubt that Polyphemus carried off comfortable quarters for the remainder of the night. But, on the other hand, he had made himself a deadly enemy.

Next day on the lawn we witnessed a single combat. It was David and Goliath over again.

## POLYPHEMUS AND THRUSH 55

Polyphemus came walking delicately like Agag out of the front door for his little morning stroll. Instantly a cock sparrow doing outpost duty on the roof uttered a shrill note. The cock thrush flew on to a syringa bush hard by, chattering loudly, while the hen thrush set up a scolding from the ivy.

Polyphemus sat down on the lawn to think. The thrush flew on to the grass in front of him and puffed himself out. Polyphemus chattered at him with that feline chatter of rage that tigers do to such perfection. The thrush ducked and hopped nearer. His voice was as loud as a penny whistle. Every separate feather was boiling with indignation. John Kemble, the actor, though a little man, was able, they say, when he played the part of a king in a rage, to wax greater and greater till he filled the stage. So did this atom of a thrush appear in his passion to expand and grow till he filled the whole lawn.

Polyphemus was greatly upset. It contra-

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dicted all his notions of bird-behaviour. He looked sideways. He wriggled. He backed. At last, after a vain effort to save his self-respect, he turned, dropped his tail, and with the meanest reduction of his bulk to half its natural size, fled into the house. Then the cock thrush and the cock sparrow and the hen thrush and the hen sparrow joined in a nervous bird-laughter of jubilation at his defeat.

After this, did Polyphemus show his nose at the hall door, or merely look out of the window, the whole confederacy was about his ears in a minute with such a hurricane of beak and claw that he went in fear of his life. There was nothing for it but to sulk on the morning-room sofa and study revenge.

## CHAPTER XI

### THOMAS MATT HOLDS A LEVEE

THE gardener from Shoolbred's having been countermanded, and Thomas Matt being duly ratified, he announced casually one morning that he had "a sort of a boy" who was coming to "assist." The boy came. He had a fuzzy head, and a spiky black moustache, and he seemed to regard us all with amazement. On the same day as the boy arrived we observed (it may have been mere coincidence) the reassembled frieze of heads about the hedge, which, as evening drew on, resolved itself into a fixed row of villagers. By this hour Thomas Matt and his assistant had laid by the heels an enormous mass of domestic weeds. This seemed to cause the village

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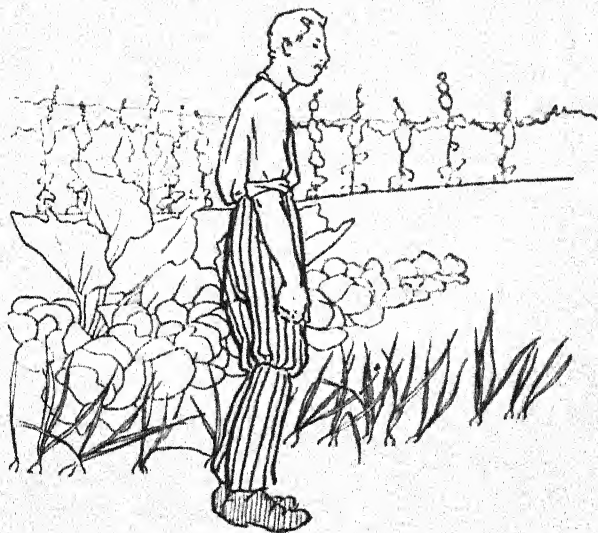
something as near excitement as it had ever known.

Eve pointed out the frieze to me, and remarked that she was going to abolish it. She started away down the garden with the most intrepid air in the world, and I brought up the rear. But as soon as we were come within speaking distance of Thomas Matt, I saw that the frieze quietly melted away, leaving nothing but one head, that of the wold ancient, who evidently felt himself too venerable an object to be so suddenly dispersed. Then I saw, too, that Thomas Matt and his assistant had carefully left in the middle of the bed they were digging the "turmit so big as a harse." I had not suspected Thomas Matt before of being a humorist; but there was something now in the wideness of his eye and the jerk of his spade that convinced me that he had his moments, and that it was into one of them that we had intruded. Our advent was hailed by the older man with a kind of senile joy,



showed expressively by the agitation of his whole rosy countenance and eyes.

"Ev'm," said he.



"That be Agas Goose," said Thomas Matt.  
"That be the woldest man in the vellage."

"Yes, aa be," said Agas Goose. "Vourscore and dree," he chuckled, "vourscore and dree years ; and I never see sich a rummage o' weeds as I do see now in that garden. Well, to be

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deed; and I do see a turmit there so big as a harse. Why, 'twud brak a shears to plough up that there gr'und; 'twud, so 'twud. Ha, ha! Aa wudn't have to dig up what Thomas Matt there be duggin' of, no, not fur a sight o' money. An' you needn' think, ma'am, I be no good of a digger. My work be done. But I be strong as any harse that do travel upon the high road. An' I wudn' dig up that piece of gr'und Thomas Matt be a duggin' of, not for a sight of money."

Thomas Matt looked on approvingly as the ancient man thus delivered himself over the hedge.

"Well," he said slowly, his glance carefully directed into a tree that marked the dispassionate middle distance between us and the venerable onlooker, "there be fine sense in what Agas Goose do say, for all that aa do stand there so full aged a man. It be the wold harse that do know what a harse load be. Agas Goose do know what be in mor—r—tal man to

do, for he have a tried duggin' in dry gr'und, as I do know."

Eve was much affected as the two old warriors shook their heads in unison. I saw her mouth actually open on the way to raising Thomas



Matt's wages. As I considered Thomas Matt's wages to be already superfluous, I made haste to propose some more immediate gratification in the way of refreshment for old Agas and tobacco for Thomas Matt.

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I then hurried Eve away from the scene of her temptation, admonishing her by the way on the first principles of political economy. As I paused for a moment, a slight cackle of laughter made us look back. The frieze of villagers was again in its place, the wold venerable in the middle. And Thomas Matt had moved a step nearer, and was regaling them, I judge, with some Mattean philosophy based upon the "turmit so big as a harse."

## CHAPTER XII

### THE PRIDE OF POPAY

ONE thing we had looked forward to in setting out to take possession of our cottage was the living upon fruits and garden delicacies and country produce. We had hoped on leaving town to leave many of the sophisticated town viands behind us too; and instead of elaborate endless dinners to have charming meals such as might have been eaten in the garden of Eden. Why, we asked ourselves, why follow all the foolish dietetic fashions of the time? Like others of our sort, Eve and I were in theory idyllists of the table, fruit-eaters and flower-lovers. The one thorn in our flesh, the one lion in our path, was Popay. Popay was, like most of her kind, a great conservative



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in these matters. She believed beef to be a Christian dish, and thought fruit frivolous.

When we wished to chasten ourselves with cheese and Protene biscuits, or something nice and light like a semolina cutlet, and when the June sun made the odour of baked meats least attractive, Popay caused our board to groan under sirloins of beef, saddles of mutton, and obnoxiously fat ducks. Partly, no doubt, to increase our consequence as a family in the village, she gave magnificent orders at the butcher's; and was not satisfied unless three or four courses of carnivorous delicacies were served every day.

The whole village was set upon aiding and abetting her in her efforts: all day long a current of extinct soles, spring chickens, ducks and geese, varied by butcher boys with fresh seaside faces, set steadily up the back entrance. And Popay rose to them one and all, with a cool determination that was proof against any extent of operations over a Vulcanic stove.

Popay was further cheered upon her path by the relishing exhortations of mademoiselle, who had the true Norman maxillaries, and whose position was fortified by her habit of trimming Popay's hats, and of decorating the most important parts of the interior of her jackets with an ingenious patchwork of silk.

Matters came to a climax on the day when the Rector came to dinner. Eve had dreamed of entertaining him to a table of cool delicacies beaming among yellow roses. But she was fated to disappointment. In the course of her domestic progress she found Popay determined to inflict upon us a horrible great hot leg of prize pork from some ancestral piggery, besides soles, mock-turtle soup, *petits bœufs*, a final Christmas pudding, and a few other injudicious trifles.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am. Them things for the Rector, ma'am? Well, indeed I know Dr. Basfleet since I could run alone. He care nothing for your aspics and your tarragons and

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your timballes and your curds. He must have his roast : and I know he do dote upon pork. He always say to my aunt that a good leg of pork well boiled do eat like chicken. And a lovelier leg I never see. I beg your pardon, ma'am, you leave the Rector to me, ma'am, and I'll engage to please him."

By my advice Eve left the Rector mainly in the hands of Popay. But on the following day a new era began. The first move in the new campaign was too important an ingredient in the philosophy of common life as exposed in these pages for it to come in at the tail of a chapter. It shall have, like Penelope, a chapter to itself. This will be after we have taken the Rector in his proper order.

## CHAPTER XIII

### DIATOMS AND A TURNIP

THERE is a chemical something, a compound of the salt in the air and the alkalies in the soil of Norfolk, which is peculiarly beneficial to the hearty herb which the vulgar call Turnip. We have seen in the windows of Norwich seed-merchants, and in local agricultural shows, monstrous examples of the field mangold-wurzel variety. But these, we imagine, were chiefly yearlings. They are not to be compared with Aunt Agnes's three-year-old, which was a specimen of the white-boiled-mutton variety in full flower. We made many attempts to measure it, a task that was made difficult by its many excrescences and by our unwillingness to disturb its magnificent crest of blossom seven feet high.

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One afternoon, when we had been enjoying a siesta under Eve's favourite tree, lazily turning over the turnip in our minds, who should enter the garden but the Rector.

Now, association is a strange thing. The Rector made me think of the church, the church



of Westminster Abbey, the Abbey of the Coronation; and that, alas! of my little disappointment. Eve and I were not yet reconciled to the fact that my researches in the rarer sub-visible fields of Science, of which the Diatom is the inhabitant, had not, after all, brought my name into the honours list. When I reflect



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upon X. and P. and Q. who have all attained distinction! But no matter for that. My labours bring their own reward. Through them I have learned to look upon men with precisely the same fine scrutiny that I have given to the minutest of organisms; and there was something in the way that the Rector, who was evidently feeling the heat, opened and shut his lips as he walked up the garden path which suggested at once the valvular action of the Diatom and the way it propels itself, of which no one but myself knows the secret, a secret that, since the world will not honour her great men, I am resolved shall die with me.

When I thought of Diatoms I confess the Rector dwindled. I answered his greeting abstractedly, I fear, for Eve said, "My husband must be thinking of his beloved Diatoms."

"Diatoms?" said the rector. "What is that?"

"Sir," said I, "have you ever seen a turnip?"

The Rector bowed. In fact, as we had even

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then discovered, no one could possibly live in Norfolk without seeing a turnip.

"Conceive, then," I continued, "that turnip reduced to infinitesimal dimensions and become, in fact, a drop of plasma. Take its horny rind and convert it into two delicate brown saucers, as fine as if they were of the delicatest Belleek ware. Conceive, then, that these approximating discs of Belleek have as fair and humane a reciprocity as husband and wife . . ."

"Ahem," said the Rector.

Eve here changed the subject. She also states that she will have no more about the Rector in this chapter, observing, very properly, that to treat the Rector of a parish as in any wise subsidiary to such organisms as turnips and Diatoms is a mistake in proportion and a civil enormity.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE TWO RECTORS

IF we have not quite realised the Rector for our readers hitherto, it is because it took us a long time to diagnose him for our own guidance. As a matter of fact, there were, as we presently came to discover, not one rector, but two rectors.

There was one rector known to his village parishioners, exemplary, didactic, unapproachable, whose voice frightened Penelope into fits in church, when it thrice repeated these words, then heard by her for the first time . . . "The Wages of Sin is Death."

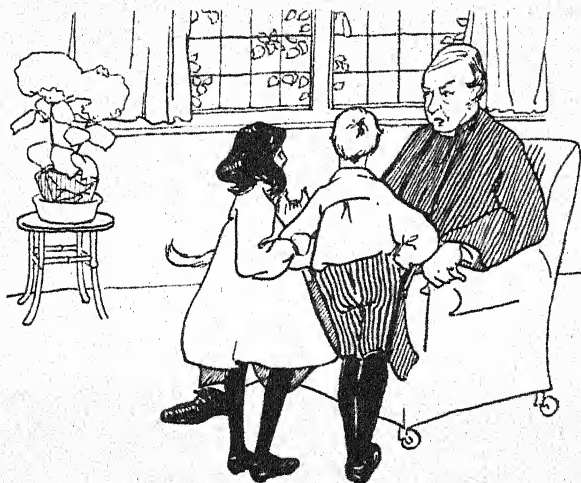
There was another rector, in whom you discovered (with the aid of port wine to unlock the man), first, a stratum of the classics; and

then, if you persisted, something truly remarkable: that is, about the third glass, the Rector proceeded to perform the apparently impossible feat of digging out of himself a rollicking, humorous ancestor, full of Horatian and Ovidian quips, joyous and reckless stories, which the affectation of our day compels us to cast away. And what added an extraordinary relish to these stories, was that still, while *sub corona Bacchi*, the Rector retained something of the papal distinction of voice and manner, that one only associated with his pulpit.

On this special occasion Eve had asked Aunt Agnes's old friend, dear Miss Clipsby, to meet the Rector. It was in the awkward moment before dinner is served, while the Rector was still, so to speak, in full canonicals, and Miss Clipsby's lisp was expressing itself in propriety, that the Turnip anticipated the vegetables proper of which we were about to partake.

A chorus of yells from the garden led us all

to the window, and in full career Mike and Penelope darted past the line of our vision, drawing on an improvised sledge the prize



turnip with shrieks of delight. A stick was stuck into the turnip, and upon the stick was set mademoiselle's new Sunday hat, to which they had, for some reason, taken an inveterate dislike. Their flight and disappearance were immediately followed by an animated pursuit



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on the part of mademoiselle, with face pale, arms tossing, mouth wide, expelling adjectives.

"Ha!" said the Rector, wishing to pass off the occurrence, "a triumphal car, I perceive. They take home the captive from the war. The pursuing fate was, I gather, a young person of French nationality, who wished to recover the trophy crowning the captive."

"The captive," said Eve, "is really the last of an extinct race—Aunt Agnes's prize turnips—allowed to outlive its season."

"Ha!" said the Rector; "*Monstrum horrendum ingens forma. . . .*"

At this moment a scuffle was heard outside the drawing-room door, and a hissing remonstrance from mademoiselle penetrated to our ears.

"*Al-lōns, al-lōns ! je vous dis qu'il faut laver les mains et la figure !*"

The voice of Mike was louder, but perfectly polite as he replied, "*Non, mademoiselle ; je ne veux rien de cela, moi.*" The door was

thrown open, and the two children burst into the room in a very friendly way. They were both of them uncommonly dirty, and Penelope had managed to catch up her adored Polyphemus *en route*. As usual a large proportion of him was hanging down.

Both of the children have a very good notion of hospitality. They hurried up at once to Miss Clipsby, shook hands effusively, and after asking her how she did, Penelope suddenly dropped the whole of Polyphemus on to her velvet gown.

"What a lovely cat!" cried Miss Clipsby, and hurriedly cast him off.

"I see you don't like him very much, though," said Penelope, in a matter-of-fact voice, and turning about, she gathered up her darling, and the two children made for the Rector.

They stood in front of him and looked him well over. Eve and I, who knew Mike's fatal knack of adapting his conversation to the comprehension of visitors, trembled for what was

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to come. When Penelope, who utilised Polyphemus as a kind of light refreshment, made as though she would drop him on to the Rector, Mike stopped her. "No, Penelope," he said; "perhaps he mightn't like it." Then taking hold of the Rector in a brotherly kind of way, "Look here," he said seriously, "this cat's an atheist."

"God bless my soul!" shouted the Rector. "What does he say?"

"Well, of course," said Mike, soothing him, "you can't expect a cat to believe——"

"My dear boy!" cried Eve in an agony. At that very moment dinner was announced. I could hear Eve apologising to the Rector all the way along the hall.

## CHAPTER XV

### TABLE-TALK

NOTHING could have been happier than our idea of asking Miss Clipsby to meet the Rector. During the soup, it is true, she was secretly occupied in removing Polyphemus's hairs from the lap of her dress. Some people have the art of choosing a kind of dress that perfectly exposes themselves and their character; and this art was certainly Miss Clipsby's. Her gown was of the finest Genoa velvet; but Miss Goose, the village dressmaker and daughter of the veteran Agas Goose, had the unlucky habit of making all her dresses on the same country plan. Thus Miss Clipsby's velvet gown frankly recalled in cut and style the print frock in which the exemplary Popay had first dawned upon

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us. The only difference was that Miss Clipsby's modest shoulders were disguised by what our grandmothers would probably have called magnificent cut-work.

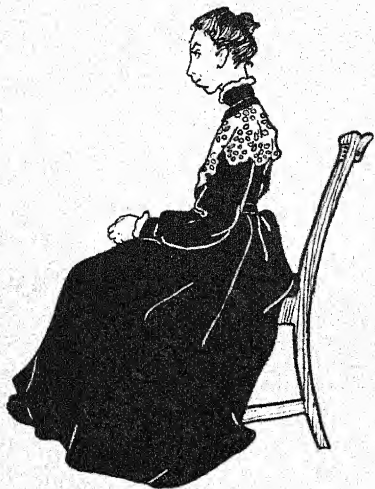
But no dressmaker could have disguised Miss Clipsby's true gentility. Although much ruffled by Penelope's onslaught, and the resultant deposit of cat's hairs, she did not in any open way betray her real annoyance ; but, as I said, all through the soup there went on that surreptitious fumbling after Polyphemus's hairs. Only after a glass of wine, and during the turbot which Eve had provided as the most suitably clerical fish, did she contrive to rally and suffer herself to become suffused with a kind of prim joyousness.

It was the same with the Rector as it was with her ; his spirits laboured at first under a temporary eclipse as a result of Mike's unwarrantable attack. So subtle are the operations of sympathy that I have no doubt this helped to bring about a comfortable degree



of fellow-feeling between them, which was destined to ripen afterwards under our own eyes.

There was, I may say, a something in Miss Clipsby's more formal bearing towards the



Rector, which was quite special ; her voice had the hushed tone and uneasy inflection that some people adopt as they enter a church. It was, Heaven forgive me, as if she saw a chancel

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looming over his clerical collar, and anticipated a litany when he opened his mouth.

But there was never anything less like a litany than the Rector's table-talk, when he was once fairly embarked upon it. True, while Mike's ineptitude rankled in his mind, and he was in a state of sipping uncertainty as to the soup, he still used what I may call his church voice. But once he had warmed to the occasion, when the wine became his friend, and the cold corners of the room seemed to close in, then his tones began to grow more mellow.

"It is greatly to be regretted," said he, with the advent of the spring chickens with which Eve had alleviated the prize pork—"it is much to be regretted that the merciful Providence, which has so showered its good things upon us, has not always bestowed along with them that immediate intelligence that turns these necessities to their best account. Now," he added (and I already seemed to hear "my brethren" as the preamble to a discourse too

edifying for a dinner-table, but instead), turning to Eve, and with an urbane conciliatory note in his voice that completely took any edge from the reflection, "madam!" he said—

"Now, MADAM! those chickens are exactly twice too large."

Eve, just for a moment, felt, I saw, a little taken aback, but she quickly recovered herself, and gallantly smiled upon him. Miss Clipsby also appeared fluttered, but reassured by her faith in the church and by Eve's smile, she gazed pensively on the unlucky chickens as if they were holy things, and adjusted herself as one may who, whatever betide, is prepared to be edified.

But the further course of the Rector's remarks seems to me to afford so much that is of value to the philosophical housekeeper that I must give it full space and befitting ceremonious attention in another chapter.

## CHAPTER XVI

### MORE TABLE-TALK

THE Rector, having elevated his forefinger, pursued the subject in this wise :—

“A spring chicken, to be eaten in perfection, should not exceed the dimensions of an honest man’s fist. Twenty minutes, not a moment more—I might even say, with sympathetic treatment, a quarter of an hour—should suffice for the perfect cooking of the dish. I will now trouble you for the breast of the bird on the right. I knew your good aunt well, my dear young lady ; it is out of respect for her memory that I present you with this information. Had she been presiding in your place, the birds would have been of the size and quality I have mentioned, and I should then have asked her,

not for the breast, but for the leg, madam, the leg. . . ." With this the Rector looked round the dining-room as if it had been an abbey; justly impressed, we remained silent, while Miss Clipsby fidgeted on her chair and craned forward as though there were some horrible fascination in the condemned creatures before us.

"The leg," resumed the Rector, "of a spring chicken that has arrived at this providential stage of growth is one of the most exquisite of all the gifts of the Almighty. There is a mucilaginous, or rather a delicately gelatinous quality in the morsel (for it is no more) unequalled in the range of English cookery, though I am told our scientific Gallic gourmands find a doubtful equivalent in the hind leg of a frog. But, observe, it is only in the drumstick that the perfect savour and succulence I have hinted of are to be found," added he, regretfully poking at the breast upon his plate.



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It is my belief that the Rector felt it fitting to use a formal language in treating of such grave matters. With the sweets his thoughts turned to lighter topics, and his language grew more easy. He condescended to stories still of a clerical and gastronomical tendency, but lighter in bouquet.

He told one tale which particularly delighted Miss Clipsby, as seeming to place in high relief her own deference and discretion of demeanour.

The story was of a certain Canon F., a notorious *bon vivant*, celebrated also for his bare-faced honesty, which refused every conventional disguise. This gentleman, having accepted an invitation to dinner at a very good house, was approached in the drawing-room by his hostess, all smiles and kind *empressement*.

"Now, my dear Canon," cried she, "I'm going to introduce you to the prettiest girl in the room to take in to dinner!"

The Canon made a gesture of horror.

"No, thank you, ma'am," he said solemnly. "I don't like to be disturbed at my meals."

By the time dessert was arrived at we were all as merry as possible. Aunt Agnes had left us, among other things, a bin of fine old '54 port. With the very first renewal of acquaintance with it the Rector still further brightened his wit.

"Ah," said he, "I wish you had known my charming old friend, Sir Brodie Spatchcock. Unquestionably the best man on the oesophagus we have ever had. But he grew a trifle pompous of late years—a trifle pompous. I remember well how, on the occasion of his last visit to me, one of my parishioners here, an old woman, called Betty Gamage, gave him a very sharp answer—a very sharp answer indeed. 'Well, Betty,' said the doctor, 'you have lost your good-man since I was here: just what I expected. Now if he had followed my advice in that little matter we know of, there is no doubt but he might have been

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alive to-day. But how did he die in the end, eh?’

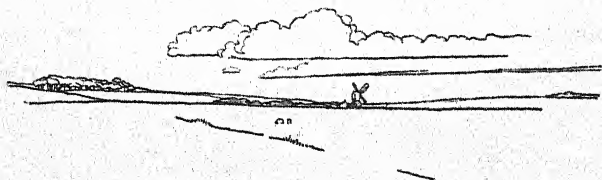
“Betty’s tongue was as sharp as a razor. ‘I be to speak the truth,’ she said, ‘I couldn’t afford a doctor to him, so he died a natural death.’”

Still better was to follow as soon as Miss Clipsby and Eve withdrew. But for various reasons I have determined to relegate the Rector’s post-prandial stories to a Latin appendix at the end of the book. We believe this proceeding is customary in all such cases, much harmless merriment being thereby procured, combined with equal advantages of scholarship and propriety.

## CHAPTER XVII

### ENTER DIOGENES

THE horns of a windmill, that stuck up like a donkey's ears from the flat landscape commanded by our bedroom window, had long struck Eve's fancy. But, much as



she desired to make a family adventure of it (having an idea of carrying home, to the furthering of our new domestic principles, a sack of wholesome English wheat, grown and ground in the neighbourhood), the difficulties of our united transport proved too much for

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a time, and the windmill remained a landmark only. It was not until what Eve believed to be chance provided us with a donkey, after we had been some weeks at the cottage, that we were able to go there.

This donkey and cart require a brief diversion of history.

One morning Popay, with the faintest glimmer of a smile, announced a man to see the master.

On these occasions Eve usually acted for me, having a rooted disbelief in my business capacity. I was startled, after a short interval of human voices, to hear a most discordant see-sawing bray in the stable-yard. Going to discover the origin, I found a tall, hungry-looking man holding by a rope and halter the most asinine-looking ass it had ever been my fortune to see.

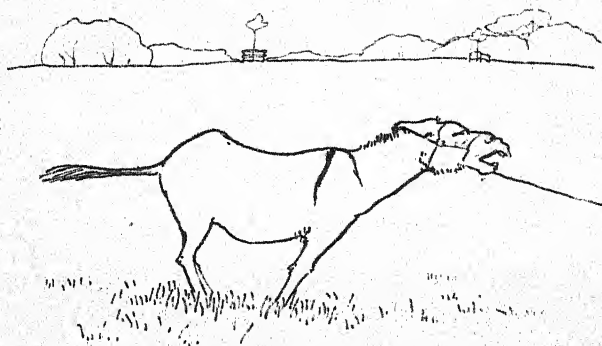
The next thing I noticed was a chattering chuckle in the air. Two heads—Mike's and Penelope's—were stuck far out of the open

*Miss  
I caught  
the  
the*



schoolroom window, where they were temporarily confined as a punishment for some act of insubordination.

Eve, I next observed, was on excellent terms with the hungry man. Without quite knowing why, I felt depressed as I observed the bifur-



cated jaws of the ass, so wide apart as it repeated its bray that a distinct slice of daylight was visible between them.

"Are you sure he isn't lazy?" I heard Eve asking the man.

"Lizy?" said the donkey man. "Lizy; he don't knay-ow what lizy be. 'Is mawther were

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the hardest-working dickey I ever see. Near all the dickeys in Norfolk be bred from her; and they be all wonderful tough. Why, do you look now at his teef . . . he be five year old, and his hoofses be like clubs, and he be that funny—why, he do larf to 'isself like as if 'ee been havin' a pint!"

It was not until Eve and the hungry man had parted, apparently in a fine glow of reciprocal feeling, that I discovered exactly how handsomely she had earned his gratitude. But Eve explained it all to her own satisfaction in a moment.

"You see," she said, "Miss Clipsby's man told me I couldn't get a donkey and tub under twenty pounds. So as I have got Aunt Agnes's nice little cart, it is quite plain that I have saved fifteen."

There were no mean calculations to quench the joy of Mike and Penelope in the transaction. Morning, noon, and night they were romping on and off that sturdy ass. They

were quite innocent of our real idea in getting him, which was to use him as their jailer. It was the impossibility of persuading them to proceed in good order along the country roads with mademoiselle that had suggested to Eve the procuring of a safe steed for their use. Confined in Aunt Agnes's nice little cart, she trusted they might pass creditably as in a sort of perambulating prison down to the seashore.

Unfortunately, Aunt Agnes had been in the habit of driving a monstrosly fat pony; and the hungry ass, when backed into the shafts of the cart by Thomas Matt (who seemed to take kindly to him), exhibited a very mean appearance.

"But never you fret, ma'am," said Thomas Matt consolingly to Eve. "I do know this little dickey, and this little dickey do know me. When he have been here a month or more, he'll fill them shafts quite tight. Ay, I do promise you, soon will he be that full, like a bar'l on wheels, that when he do lay hisself

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down, up he will not get until he do choose. You be all so tender-hearted-like, you be no fair match for a dunkey."

And in truth the ass developed a most ravenous appetite. Mike and Penelope fed him all day with bread and butter and the finest loaf-sugar. Thomas Matt contrived his greens. Mademoiselle shrieked at him a whole French scale of endearments as she fed him with contraband from the kitchen. But in spite of such pasturage, the ass earned Popay's undying hatred by finding an appetite for clothes. Flannel he liked to taste, but linen was his delight. Popay said he actually swallowed one of her pocket-handkerchiefs! What he really enjoyed, however, was to stand quietly in the sun, eating sheets.

The creature has perhaps run on far enough, seeing that we have to get him and the wind-mill into the next chapter.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### EN ROUTE

MADemoiselle and Mike saved us the trouble of bestowing a name on the ass. "Ah, c'est mon frère!" cried mademoiselle, much to the children's delight, when she first beheld him. "Had we not better," said Mike, "call him Diogenes? Because, you know, he will have mostly to live in the tub." Thereafter, under the twin names of our Brother and of Diogenes, he became a great family institution. At first Eve was tempted to go on long donkey-cart expeditions with the youngsters; and it was a pleasant sight to see them setting out in the cart, packed with spades and buckets, scarlet bathing suits (in which Eve said the children looked like animated poppies



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in a bed of sand), sandwiches and bottles of milk, and all beaming with delightful anticipations. But in the end Eve was sure to return in discomfiture, leading the ass, herself quite exhausted after prolonged struggles on the high-road, while the children amused themselves discreditably anywhere in the rear of the cart. Thomas Matt was right. Eve was no match for the donkey. With every victory he became more wooden in his obstinacy, and Eve declared, laughing, that she found herself a very Balaam for helplessness.

It was Penelope, who is really a thoughtful and affectionate child, who at last interfered.

"My precious ma," she said, "you shall not come with us to get tired any more. We do not want you. We would rather not have you. Mademoiselle dearly loves her little Brother, and he loves her. She knows all about asses in France, she says. So we will go with her, and we would much rather."

From that on there never was such a success.

The children went long distances with mademoiselle in the cart, to come back, fresh and giggling, having collected all manner of country produce, in the most remarkably short spaces of time. We often asked them how she managed it, and never got any answer but that mademoiselle understood the nature of French asses, and found them just the same over here.

It was when our transport had reached this state of efficiency that we decided, one sunshiny morning, to make the adventure of the windmill. On the never-to-be-forgotten journey thither we learned something it is highly desirable for every reader to know who has any feeling for the tribe of our Brother.

On this particular occasion it was decided that mademoiselle should drive the children in the donkey-cart by the high-road, a distance of about two and a half miles. Eve and I were to make a circuit of a few miles on our bicycles, and join the party anywhere in the neighbourhood of the windmill. A Norfolk breeze swept

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us along the latter part of our road quicker than we had thought for, and we halted at a pleasant woodside opening upon the high-road, to wait for the rearguard. Eve had already remarked that it would not be wonderful if the donkey failed to reach the windmill that day. Judge, then, of our astonishment when at the same moment we heard the noise of wheels and the rattle of hoofs, and saw the donkey equipage coming round a turn at a smart pace. Shrieks of laughter came from Mike and Penelope as it went by at a gallop, and we saw mademoiselle leaning well over the front of the tub, and blithely prodding the adjacent parts of the animal with some invisible weapon.

“Ah, bonne petite bête, comme je l'aime!” she cried shrilly, as she prodded. “Voilà comme il trotte bien, n'est-ce pas, mes petits enfants? Hue! hue! il est gai comme un oiseau! Oh, la, la! comme il fait bon voyager comme cela!” And they were gone.

Eve looked at me.

"What the dickens has she got?" asked I.

"I really believe it must be a hat-pin," said Eve; and if the ass had really been her little brother, she could not have looked more shocked.

We seized our bicycles to follow the afflicted animal; but it was no use. When we reached the windmill the tub was empty, the ass securely tethered and enjoying the grass. Mike and Penelope, seeing us arrive, gulped down a last giggle. Mademoiselle was already pointing out the mechanical marvels of the windmill to them—*with a hat-pin.*

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE WINDMILL

WE had not come to the windmill out of mere fancy, but for a serious purpose. Eve was determined, and so was I, that our bread should henceforth be made of good British wheaten flour with the gluten unimpaired. It was part of our anti-carnivorous gospel; Eve even went so far as to say that if she could not get it otherwise she would grow wheat in Aunt Agnes's paddock.

Still, when we were once standing within the round hedge, and under the very sails of the windmill, we felt ourselves seized with an enthusiasm for the thing itself, questions of bread-and-butter apart. Mike and Penelope had been reading a nicely expurgated edition of



*Don Quixote*, and it was evidently with a sense of romantic and impossible adventures that they galloped round and round the space of green encircling it, and then paused to stare upon its pointed top and cream-coloured walls. Looking at it with their eyes, we saw that it was fantastic, antiquated, terrifying, delightful, and floury. Its huge sails rose ragged but bold upon the air, and the many gaps where the cross-spars had fallen out added to the sense of its aerial forces.

And then, it was one whose whole corporation was revolutionary, not one with a mere revolving cap. Its outer periphery was a rusty rail in a gravel rut, in which travelled two wheels taller than Mike. Even the broad, pyramidal flight of steps leading to its door revolved with the rest; and there was something entrancing, I saw, to Mike's mind in the idea of a fugitive flight of steps.

The steps themselves were very rickety, and showed gaps where whole planks had gone.

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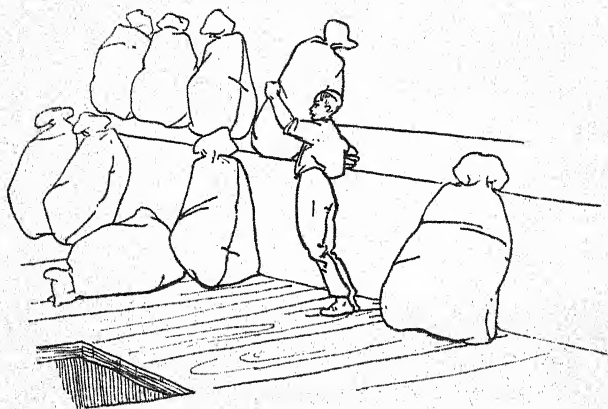
Mounting them was like going up into the sky ; and who knew, said Eve, but the sails might suddenly begin to turn, and the windmill travel away with us, Heaven knows where ?

When we had successfully mounted these, and entered the door, not having hitherto discovered any sign of life, we were rather taken aback to see a dark interior full of strange objects ; out of the farthest corner a pale face, set on a pale floury form, was gazing upon us with an expression half beatific, half amazed.

The creature, as he stood there in that dusky, filmy atmosphere, was like nothing that we had expected. Six foot high, white as an angel with dust of flour, he might have passed for Michael himself, had it not been for his eyes, which at a first glimpse had looked like those of a rapt visionary, but which on a nearer view proved to be foolish and rustical, of a pale, watery blueness. The candid effect of his whole person was embellished by the golden lustre of his hair and moustache, which all the

flour he was exposed to had not sufficed to blanch.

Mademoiselle, in whom the morning's joy had not yet been clouded by any remarks of Eve's, was the first to give expression to our



feelings. She had a wonderful eye, had mademoiselle, for the points of people.

"Mon Dieu!" she murmured, rapturously clasping her hands. "Quel ange! quel fleur de lys! On ne dirait jamais que ce n'était que de la farine!"

"Good day," said I. "You are the miller, I suppose?"

The apparition was evidently overcome by bashfulness. With lips slightly parted, he fumbled in his waistcoat-pocket, and finally produced a most unangelic little implement—the stump of a black clay pipe, with a bare half-inch of stem, which he stuck in his jaw. He seemed to get better after that, for when I repeated my question, he hesitated only for a minute or two, and then answered me plump:

"Noa," said he.

"What can you be, then?" asked Penelope in a high shrill voice.

After a few minutes' careful consideration he replied:—

"A be the miller's man."

This sensible and modest answer put us all in spirits.

"Is your master at home?" asked Eve.

"Noa, mum; he talked o' goan ta Yaam'th."

"And is he gone?"

"He be gone, mum, sure enough."

"And are you going to grind to-day?"

"Noa, mum; we shawn't be grindin' any to-day."

He preserved his angelic aspect while he turned over each question in his mind, and slowly produced the answer. He was not loquacious, it was clear; and when we expressed a desire to visit the upper part of the mill, he turned himself silently about, and with a heavy step led the way up a rude, ramshackle ladder, to which only a hanging rope served as climber's aid.

Somehow or other we all contrived to get up on that crazy top floor where there was not room for one person to turn round comfortably, so crowded was it with queer shafts and cranks and pulleys, and beset with dangerous trap-doors. The wind rushed in at the little square opening that served as window, and clattered in the boards about our ears. "I suppose," said Eve, "it's too windy to grind at all sometimes. Is it too windy to grind to-day?"



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The miller's man gaped. Eve had presented two ideas to his mind in rapid succession, and the result was a complete damming up of his intelligence.

In the hope of setting it working again, I extracted a coin from my waistcoat pocket, and allowing him ample time to consider it, and as it were to embrace the idea of it, I then shouted three words in his ear.

In a moment he grasped coin and idea together; then, seizing a rope, he disappeared with unexpected quickness through a trap-door. We heard some clicking below; then suddenly the whole universe seemed to groan and labour and turn about, and involve us all in a cumbrous and terrific wooden agony.

"Thank you!" cried Eve, her hands to her ears, "that's quite enough"; so with some difficulty I descended, and begged the angel to set the universe at rest again. His foolish hand commenced to operate, and presently all was still.

It was hard work getting the whole party down the gapped and rickety ladders. Eve stuck half way. Penelope lost her head, and had to be carried. Mademoiselle sat on the top step with a wide, hysterical smile, and declined to move. At last Eve thought of fetching the miller's man to carry her down. Mademoiselle looked affectingly upon her spotless delaine and her French jacket. "Decidément non," she said. "Il est beau ; il est charmant ; mais il est trop farineux. Il vaut mieux me casser le cou." Upon which, I am told, she came down with great agility.

Once down, Eve and I went to business, and spent a profitable half-hour among the sacks of English wheat—large and golden-grained—and the barley and rye besides. Eve ended by ordering enough to victual a camp. But I believe if she had ordered the windmill itself, the man would have shown no emotion. Nevertheless, he improved on acquaintance. From the substance of his answers we gathered that

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the halcyon days of the windmill were everywhere over: there was no demand for English wheat: the poorest cottager preferred the tasteless snow-white foreign flour.

Here was the explanation of the gapped sails and broken steps. Our windmill belonged already to the past and was fast becoming the stuff of romance. Already it had the air of a freak in its crazy simplicity, so different from the compact, ill-smelling cleverness of to-day's inventions. Soon a windmill will be as rococo as a giraffe or as Don Quixote in the helmet of Mambrino. We shall be nourished on American flour, walk in American boots, read American novels. Do not our English lanes smell already of American oil trusts?

As we turned to go we looked with affection on the miller's man. He was twisting the full sacks about as though they were casual feather-weights. In his muscle and his simplicity he too seemed to belong to the past.

When we got home Eve lost no time in com-

municating with Popay; who received the news of the consignment of flour with the enthusiasm of the true artist in bread. But when Eve came to mention the miller's man, Popay was seized with the most disillusioning recollections.

"There now!" said she. "Goodness me! You have seen that silly man? The most foolish in all the country, that's what he is. When I lived down in the village he used to come with the pig's food twice a week for my friend that lived next door. Well, there now; but he was silly. She couldn't bear the sight of him. She never would open the door more than an inch, and he would talk the most foolish nonsense in through the crack. And then she would shut the door in his face; and still he would be standing outside like a sheep. And she do tell me he go there still. But he may go and stand there for ever; my friend, she take no interest in men."

"When we got home," did I say? But we were a long way from being home as yet.

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While Mike and I harnessed Diogenes, Eve drew mademoiselle into the shadow of a hayrick; there they held a short conversation, which was destined to have most important results, as you shall hear in due course.



## CHAPTER XX

### A WAYSIDE VISION

AS soon as we had fairly started for home Eve suggested that she and I had better ride very slowly so as to be at hand in case of difficulties. What happened afterwards showed that she had rightly interpreted the very mingled expression on mademoiselle's face.

The return journey was indeed one succession of unexampled miseries. In place of the merry going and the gay *Te Deums* of the morning mademoiselle showed a penitential countenance and a limp hand on Diogenes's rein. He was slow at first to profit by his Jehu's dejection. Perhaps his sides still remembered the applications of the morning, for he went fairly well at first, and Eve was much gratified.

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By degrees, however, he began to draw conclusions from mademoiselle's altered demeanour towards him, for he suddenly slackened his pace. Hearing nothing behind him but a depressed "Hue ! hue !" he then playfully walked from one side of the road to the other. Eve and I dismounted. Mike jumped out of the tub, and running to the animal's head, dragged at it in a humane way and tried to lead him along the road. Diogenes rolled a contemptuous eye upon him, sidled away, and finally stood stock still.

"Il va se reposer maintenant," said mademoiselle placidly, "il va tout casser. Je m'en fiche."

"Mother, mother !" shrieked Penelope piteously, scrambling out of the tub, "he's going to lie down !"

It was only too true ; Diogenes was already curtsying between the shafts.

Dropping both bicycles in the dust for Mike and Penelope to pick up, and snatching the

little whip out of the tub, I seized the animal by the head, backed him up in the shafts with some firmness, and then proceeded to urge him forwards, encouraging him at the same time with my voice and a mild application of the butt end of the foolish little whip that Eve had provided, and which broke at the first touch.

It may have been fancy (Eve says she did not hear it), but from the tub behind I believe I heard mademoiselle say, in barely audible murmurs of gentle astonishment, "*Monsieur se fache! Oh, la, la, mon pauv' Diogène!*"

Bitterly regretting our quixotic championship of the odious Diogenes, Eve and I by turns dragged and exhorted him towards home, while Mike and Penelope amused themselves destructively with the bicycles in our rear, and mademoiselle sat within the tub, the pensive mistress of the occasion.

One more turn of the road, at the second milestone from home, just as we were wondering how we should ever do the last two miles,

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a sudden sound reached our ears. It was a shriek, which, if we had been old romancers, we should have called "eldritch."

But the unholy personality from which it proceeded demands, and shall have, a chapter to itself.

## CHAPTER XXI

### OLD NANCY

BY the roadside there ran a narrow channel of grass, with a heap of road-mender's stones in its midst. And there, on our nearer approach, we saw a most unusual sight. On the grass there capered and danced a dwarfish old body of a woman.

Tethered as we were to the sulky Diogenes, we had every chance of scanning the dancing figure. As we came abreast of her, she seemed to us the most shocking old person it had ever been our lot to see. Her head reclined almost on her right shoulder, and this, as we afterwards discovered, not so much from infirmity as from pure villainy. In proof of this her tongue hung out at an unheard-of angle, as



she danced and shuffled in her capacious boots. As for her clothes, they were not wanting in abundance: she was literally heaped with a confusion of rags. But her throat was bare, and her lowest petticoat did not suffice to hide her indescribable ankles.

At the first glimpse of her Mike and Penelope hastily delivered both bicycles to their mother, and scrambling into the tub, clapped to the door.

Just as we came alongside, the abhorrent old wife fetched in her tongue, and slightly erecting her head, clothed in a most irreverent sun-bonnet, she began to sing in a gay cracked treble, and to a most unearthly tune—

“ Give oi a penny,  
Give oi a penny,  
Ladies and gentleman,  
Give oi a penny.”

After some hesitation I gave her a penny, the only copper I had, and we took up at once our uncomfortable march, not liking to show too

openly our astonishment, which indeed was converted as it rose into an instant half repugnance.

We had not proceeded ten yards further, and



Mike and Penelope were staring back from the tub, with horror widening their eyes, when the same eldritch cry again electrified us. We turned then, and saw the old dame had

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promenaded into the middle of the road, and was looking after us.

"Hoo—ee—ee! There's a kind, rich gentleman with nothing but a copper for poor old Nancy! And him with his carriage and a dickey to it. To whit, to whoo—oo—oo—oo!" she hooted like a malevolent old owl, and executed meantime a final shuffle in the dust, which expressed more shockingly than I can say a kind of depraved contempt for us and all our belongings.

And, indeed, I cannot quite describe the feeling, but an extraordinary sense of meanness overwhelmed our rear, and left us too depressed to struggle in any adequate degree with the leathern and obdurate Diogenes.

But this sense of exposure soon gave way to a bitter indignation as the last whoop from Nancy reached our ears.

"Mademoiseile," I said, firmly addressing the tub in that excellent French that Eve persists in depreciating, "*ceci est trop fort. Je*

m'en vais. Cet animal est le fils du démon. Prenez-le et faites tout ce que vous voulez excepté le hat-pin que madame n'aime pas. Adieu."

Without a glance in the direction of mademoiselle's countenance, but unable to avoid obtaining an impression from the farcical attitude of her hands, elbows, and shoulders, I received my bicycle from the flushed and exhausted Eve, desired her to mount her own, and in a moment we were enjoying a sudden and most blessed escape from our responsibilities.

## CHAPTER XXII

### IDOL-WORSHIPPERS

AFTER the heat and commotion of our late journey, you will be pleased to picture us reposing in the easiest of chairs in a shady corner of Aunt Agnes's morning-room. Flanked by the most delectable of afternoon tea-tables, we were enjoying the sweet breeze that stole in from the garden, whose annals indeed we have much neglected of late.

The vacancy of our repose was, however, soon interrupted by the sound of wheels and the brisk clattering of small hoofs, and in a moment the air was pervaded by the chiming treble of children's voices. It was the return, and sooner than we expected.

Unconscious of our presence behind the open



French windows, Mike and Penelope were relieving themselves by an irruption all over the lawn, when they were met by Popay in cap and apron. Thus we were at no trouble in gaining a little information, which in our exhausted condition was no slight advantage.

For the children lost no time in shrieking to Popay their adventure of the dancing beggar-dame.

"Ah, there now!" said Popay; "there now! you've been and met old Nancy; that's a wicked old thing, that is!—the wickedest in the village!"

"How does she be wicked, Popay?"

"Well, indeed, that I couldn't tell you. But she is a terr'ble wicked one; and time was, they do say, when Nancy was the prettiest girl in all Leysham. 'Twas vanity that brought her ruin. But there, there! I couldn't tell you about her."

"Has she got a house, Popay? Does she live all by herself?"

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“ Indeed, she has a very good house, but that dirty inside no one do want so much as to look in at the door. And Benjamin, her poor old husband, do go in mortal fear of her. And Nancy, she do beat him most crool ; and, lawk ! how he do cry ! ”

“ What—an old man cry ? ”

“ Ay ; cry, cry indeed, cry like a child. And not a neighbour dare go near for terror of the old woman. Oh, a wicked, a terr’ble wicked old woman is Nancy Sevely. Mind, now, neither of you never go near her, nor speak to her at all ; else she’ll be sure to work some mischief. Oh, a terr’ble, a terr’ble wicked old woman is Nancy ! ”

With such delectable particulars as these to go upon, it was not long before the children had worked up the idea of Nancy into a regular bogey. Many were the strange scraps of information they picked up concerning her and her habits in the course of their daily expeditions.

For they were now travelling the roads as merrily as ever with mademoiselle and her Diogène. Eve could never get over a certain uneasiness as to the fresh methods that might



be employed by mademoiselle. "I do not think it is good for children to drive a donkey," she would say, with a sigh. "I should like them to have a gentle and high-spirited creature who would go without urging." I saw plainly that

she was meditating a pony, and made haste to change the subject for private reasons of my own.

Sometimes Eve would ask the children with assumed carelessness how they had got on. Then Penelope would giggle and say, "Oh, beautifully, mummy dear. Mademoiselle is so clever and speaks so nicely to Diogenes. She says that in France they have a hundred ways of making a donkey go, and I believe she knows them all."

But Mike, who has a more serious mind than Penelope, came to me in private one day, and "Father," he said, "is it true what mademoiselle says, that donkeys are fond of what she calls 'oo'?" Now whatever did the boy mean? But I told him not to worry his mother.

For Eve was just then concerned about what she called the children's moral tone. On the Sunday before, old Nancy had planted herself in the road just as the congregation were coming out of church. When, after pulling

a bunch of dock and dandelion from the road, she began to dance in the face of decorum and sing—

“Ladies and gentlemen,  
Boy my sweet voilets.  
Give I a penny  
And boy my sweet voilets,”

the children were convicted of visibly laughing under the very eye of Miss Clipsby.

Moreover, Eve said they were often now playing at old Nancy and dancing in the shrubbery with shawls on and their tongues hanging out. She had still to discover that old Nancy had been transmuted in their minds into a sort of heathen idol, who must be propitiated by sacrifice.

It seems that old Nancy had the habit of wandering the roads at regular hours each day, and searching the ditches for rags and such objects of value and interest, which, when discovered, she promptly thrust into her bosom.

It was not till several articles, such as silk



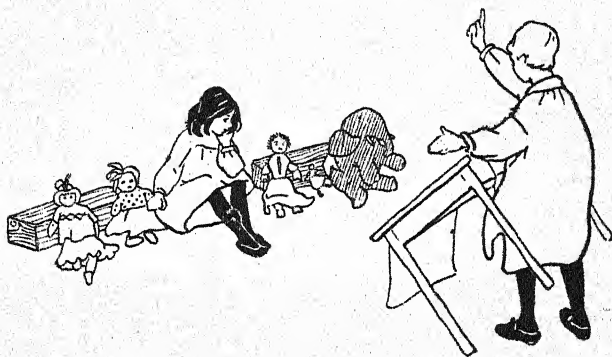
pocket-handkerchiefs, pieces of cake, and anti-macassars, had disappeared that our suspicions were aroused. They became active when Eve saw Mike one day at lunch stealthily putting the bone of his mutton-chop into his pocket.

Eve communicated with me after lunch, and together we watched the children run down the lawn to a corner of the hedge which bordered the road, comfortably out of sight of the house. We discreetly followed in time to see them lying on their stomachs by the hedge, shaking with suppressed laughter.

Coming softly up, we stooped to look through the hedge, and there by the roadside lay the mutton bones, some collars and cuffs, odds and ends of bread, and one or two dusters and table-napkins.

A horrid chuckle from the road warned us of the approach of Nancy. From our post behind a friendly bush we had the exquisite enjoyment of seeing the old dame tucking our property into her familiar receptacle.

Eve took the children back with her into the house. She must have been successful in reaching their consciences, for when I looked into the nursery next morning Mike had his night-shirt on over his clothes, while he preached fervently from within the legs of the



overturned nursery table. Penelope, sitting in a row with thirteen or fourteen battered dolls and a humorous-looking elephant, was regarding him with a rapt expression which I had never before remarked upon her face.

I listened to a few sentences, and then withdrew unseen, revolving in my mind the pos-

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sible application of what appeared to be Mike's text, "Jupiter loveth a cheerful giver."

But one thing was pretty plain—the children were holding a revival meeting. I mentioned the fact to Eve, without, however, quoting Mike's text, and she was quite touched.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE WEED HARVEST

WHEN once Thomas Matt had taken to himself a temporary assistant with a blue beard, the weeds and ancient vegetables were soon all mowed down and hoed up and put into a cock fifteen feet by thirty. For three days this heap was the favourite resort of Mike and Penelope, who every afternoon threw down and scattered what Thomas Matt had erected in pride during the morning. On the third day they again got hold of the old mammoth turnip, and carved a kind of rude face on its rhinoceros rind. This they stuck on top of the cock. From thence it looked down upon us with a stare something resembling that of Thomas Matt.

Instead of resenting this device, Thomas Matt appeared to be gratified by it. Pitchfork in hand, he stood still to admire this heaped-up evidence of his own neglect, evidently finding in its proportions a secret source of pride.

Carried away by my admiration of his sublime rusticity, I ventured upon some humorous and pertinent remarks about the weeds, ending up with a suggestion that it was a fine harvest, and that I supposed we must have a harvest-home.

I noticed on making this allusion that Thomas Matt's eyes opened to their widest extent, while he slowly transferred his entire mouth into his left cheek. This facial appearance was one which my short acquaintance with Thomas Matt had already taught me to distrust.

"Ya—as," said he reflectively; "that wo'd be w—whol'—som', and a bit friendly-like. There be many doin's to a harvest wi' us Leys-ham folk. Yaas, that there be! Haw, haw!" and he laughed horribly. "When the harvest



be car'ied, they do go about getherin' larges. And when they have a-got it in they goes to the public, and they has a sing-song!"

His tones were at once so joyous and so suggestive that I thought it best to change the subject.

"But how," said I, "are we to get all those weeds taken away, Thomas?"

"There be dickeys in the vellige," he replied, "that will ate that weed. And there be ole harses that will be thankf'l ta have it for letter. Ef we burn it in the garden, 'twill smell ye all out. He so be that have a dickey will haul un off for northen."

Owing to my luckless suggestions of a harvest-home, and the consequent representations made by Thomas Matt in the village, there was a gathering extraordinary of villagers at our gates and fringing the hedge and wall of our garden on the afternoon of our weed harvest. Amongst them the wagging head of the wold venerable was to be seen all agog

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with excitement. Elongating and shortening himself by turns, he was continually disappearing and reappearing at unexpected points.

At the gate were two donkey-carts, loaded high with weeds, and ready to start; a third was being tramped by Thomas Matt's assistant, who looked unnaturally lanky against a beautiful green evening sky.

We ourselves were assembled at the kitchen-garden end of the pergola, from thence observing the familiar frieze of villagers and the wold venerable in their midst. I felt encouraged now to presume on a certain range of acquaintance, which permitted me to appear on the scene without straining their natural sense of the situation. The ancient man received me with rapture.

"Well, to be deed," he yelled, "that were a sight of weeds! Ha-aaa! Aa be vourscore and dree year old, an' aa never see sich dree dickey carr'in the weed out a one gard'n; that aa didn't!"

"Yis, bor!" said another ancient pensioner; "an the gr'und do look cold-like wi'out no green coät to't. Tummus Matt, Tummus Matt, where be your savoys and Mary-greens?"

For some reason Tummus Matt rather resented this. "Don't you be too eager, Muster Blaze," he said. "The cabbidge is not growed like a masroom in a noight. 'Twill cost measter here a sight o' money before there be cabbidges growed on this ground; that 'twill, that 'twill!"

It was Thomas Matt's notion to keep continually rubbing in the recollection of the cost of his entertainment. As if this were not sore enough, a minute after, when I had rejoined Eve and the children, I became aware of a deputation of two advancing, hat in hand, towards us.

"What in the world is this?" I muttered to Eve.

"Largesse!" she answered, smiling maliciously; "we have heard all about it. Put your hand in your pocket, my dear. Thomas Matt

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is very particular that it was the master's own suggestion. It is their regular harvest custom."

The pair were very near by this. I smiled graciously upon them, and felt in my pockets, but to my consternation could only find half a sovereign, which, not to look foolish, I put into the proffered hat. In spite of my panic at the sacrifice, I could not help being delighted with the result of it. Both men backed away, and looked carefully one after the other into the hat. Then, bobbing and ducking to Eve and me, they uttered a rapid, half-intelligible rigmarole—

"God bless the measter, meastress too,  
And health, and prosper all ye do !  
And fill your floor and fill your barn  
So close as bread wi' woats and carn.  
And so we go, and so we come  
To joy ourselves at Harvest-whoam."

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE SING-SONG

THAT same evening—

“I wonder what a sing-song is like?”  
said Eve to me.

Quarter of an hour later we were walking down the village street. The house doors were for the most part open, and women in white aprons were popping in and out of each other's gates like rabbits in the dusk. There was a pleasing animation abroad ; no doubt each one was inspired with a feeling of pride in the deputy she had contributed, directly or indirectly, to that evening's celebrations.

The village inn was a charming little place, with an irregular thatched roof that suggested Miss Mitford and country idylls rather than beer.



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As soon as we got near we became aware of a dull, droning sound launched upon the air, which evidently proceeded from human lungs, and which was calculated to persist for the greatest length of time with the least possible wear and tear to the human frame.

We walked up and down with as finished an appearance of nonchalance as we could assume ; then, trusting in the thickening of the dusk, we stood for a few minutes near the door.

The buzzing noise from within soon resolved itself into a hoarse chorus, the words of which we were presently able to make out.

This was how it went—

“ Green leaves they were,  
Green leaves they were,  
Green leaves they were,  
Green leaves.

“ King George he was,  
King George he was,  
King George he was,  
King George.”

And so on, *da capo*.

We listened for a long time ; then, "What is it they're singing?" said Eve to a white-aproned woman who had popped round the corner to look at us.

"Oh, dare, oh, dare, pore craäthers!" said she; "that's what they're singin' when they're too shame-faced to start a toon. Sometimes they do go on like that an hour an' more. There's no toon in it, raly; a body can sing any toon he like. Hare, now."

We did "hare," till Eve said her brain was going.

So we went for quite a good walk, but when we came back there it was, still going on.

"Good heavens!" cried she, hastily seizing my arm, and we set off again.

When we arrived a third time, to our relief, there was a promising stillness, broken only by a rumbling sound like that of a man in the agonies of clearing his throat. This went on for a while. Presently a loud voice interfered.

"Stop that hackin'," it said.

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The noise ceased for a moment, then recommenced à *plus belle*.

"Shut that roar, man," said another voice encouragingly.

"He be only gettin' his fiddle strings ready, bor!" said a cracked voice that we joyfully recognised as that of the wold venerable. There was a murmur of sympathy, and then the noise recommenced.

"Shut up that dawg's howlin'," said the first voice, interfering again.

Thus stimulated, the performer very suddenly burst into song. And a right good song it was, though a trifle hoarse.

"There was a man that had two sons,  
And both of them were brothers.  
Tobias was the name of one,  
Triangus of the other.

"Now these two lads went one fine day,  
The old red cow to find;  
Tobias he got on before,  
Triangus on behind.

"They went to town a coat to seek,  
The two of them of one day:  
Tobias wore it all the week,  
Triangus on a Sunday."

Here the singer broke down in a fearful fit of coughing, which lasted an uncommon time.

"If 'twas to save me life," he gasped at last, puffing like a dog in the water, "I couldn' sing no more, I couldn' now."

There was a prolonged murmur of sympathy and encouragement.

"'Twas all that hackin' he did before he started," said the first voice.

"It be raly a pity to stop," screamed the wold venerable. "That be a rare sweet old song. I like to hare o' Tobias's coat o' many colours. I've knowd that song since ever I stood upo' my two lags. My granfaader, he were a capital ole singer, he were. I be your-score an' dree year ole——"

"Say no more now, Agas Goose," said the

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voice of Thomas Matt. "Lave that swede in the grut. That yarn's gettin' very near as old as your granfaader. Let the man have a chance to finish his song."

But the man would not finish his song. He groaned and "hacked" and coughed, and his audience argued with him till Eve and I were tired out. We walked up and down, and at last Eve said she would go home.

We had hardly got any distance when a familiar rumble lent energy to our retreat.

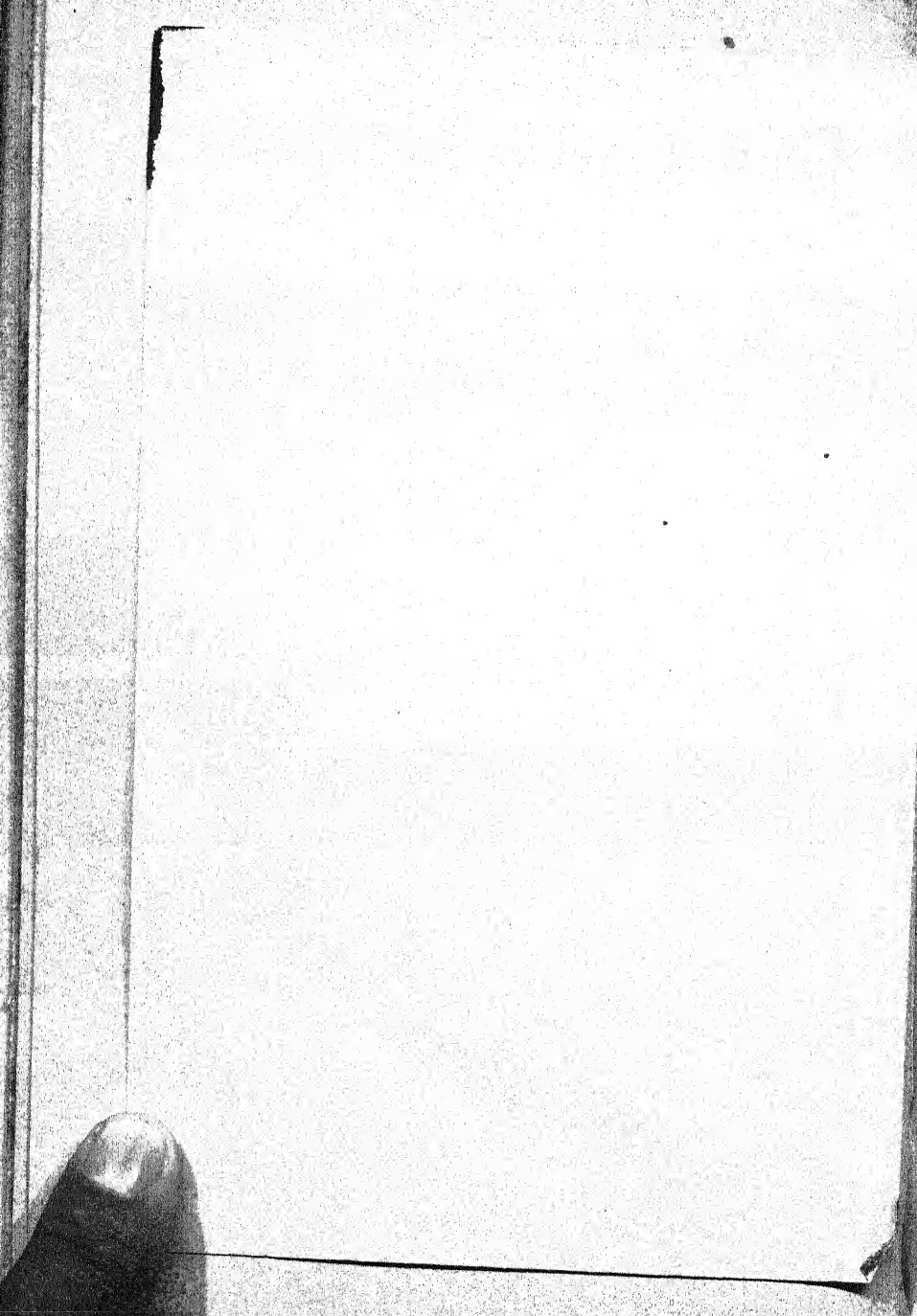
It was to the music of "Green leaves they were" that we fled towards home.



## CHAPTER XXV

### THOMAS MATT JUSTIFIED

AS soon as the garden beds were cleared of weeds, the lawns mowed and rolled, and the garden walks gravelled afresh, it was astonishing how soon the flowers showed themselves. It was as though they came out in battalions together to triumph at the defeat of the weeds. Now that the hot weather was come, the children seemed to prefer its cool shades even to the delights of running bare-legged about the sands. Penelope would say in a very determined way, "Now if anybody wants me to do my hair, or brush my teeth, or tidy my bedroom, or go for a walk, I shall not be able to bear it." Then she would retire under a favourite tree, where she would lie on her



headed assistant was to be seen digging and tilling, and making provision, as far as I could judge, for a noble crop of peas and salads in November. At the same hour Thomas Matt was to be seen slowly tacking about among the thickets of Scotch roses and cinnamon roses; the dwarf bushes that shone in rows under the south wall, and the climbers that rambled everywhere.

Occasionally he was to be seen upon his knees, a monstrous bulk (Thomas Matt's waistcoat behind was more capacious than any person's I ever saw), engaged in trimming his pinks. He had a most agreeable way of cultivating them into circular patches, two feet across. These became in due time covered with thousands of blossoms, like miniature drifts of snow. At night these patches shone everywhere like silver, and their perfume was extraordinary. When the moon was up, and the Norfolk wind had sunk to a salt air come up from the sea, Eve and I used to walk

round and round and up and down the garden paths, and wonder if winter in London were a dream.

At this time we were all tanned and freckled to an alarming extent. Ever since Mike and Penelope had taken to sandals, their legs had been a serious family concern, for they were all four become as indelicate a crimson as Aunt Agnes's beautiful drawing-room chairs and sofas, that Eve had very properly covered up in country-looking chintz.

It was no wonder indeed if we were all very burnt. There is something peculiarly rasping in Norfolk atmospheric effects, and to these we were exposed for about fourteen hours every day. For it had become our habit to hold an amateur French breakfast-party every morning early, under the shade of a weeping willow on the lawn.

At these repasts mademoiselle assisted with enthusiasm, fetching and carrying home-baked loaves of wheat-bread, rye-bread, potato-flour-

cum-wheat bread, corn bread *à l'Americaine*; yes, every possible combination and colour of bread, from the most scrupulous chemic white to the blackest brown; jugs of coffee too, and generous bowls of cream. And as she went and came she sniffed the morning air with rapture, and bade the children thank the good God for their breakfast. "Oh, the good sunshine!" she would cry, with sincere delight. "Oh, the good air so fresh, and the little flowers that smell of the dew! How the morning reanimates the heart! (Comme le matin ranime le cœur!)." And though we did not feel inclined to express ourselves as innocently as mademoiselle, there is no doubt that we took a sort of primitive delight in these breakfasts. Once, and once only, was there any cloud cast upon our cheerfulness, and that was on the tragical occasion when Polyphemus took his revenge.



## CHAPTER XXVI

### POLYPHEMUS'S REVENGE

ON this particular morning poor Penelope had come downstairs with a grievance; Mike had been up at half-past seven, and had gone off on a private expedition of his own with William Trattles, without taking the trouble to wake her. Penelope looked on this as an act of treachery, and her naturally pleasant temper was a good deal ruffled.

So when Mike began—

“Penelope, I have thought of a really holy game for to-morrow; we will play at the Danes robbing the monasteries.”

Penelope openly scoffed.

“Don’t make faces,” said Mike.

“Don’t make faces? Gracious! What may you do, then?”

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Here a murmur of expostulation from Eve recalled Penelope to the decencies of life.

"I know, mother," said she, still glaring.

"Oh, children, you should never let  
Your angry passions rise."

Eve now gazed upon the mocking Penelope with an expression of grieved astonishment.

"Penelope, is it you that can speak so to your mother?" she said.

"I know, mummie," said Penelope, half crying and flinging herself on her mother's shoulder.

"The ravens shall pick out their eyes,  
And eagles eat the same."

Evidently the good Dr. Watts's influence is still a living one.

"Mother's precious," said Eve fondly, gazing upon the still slightly mutinous countenance of her daughter.

"Precious mother!" promptly answered Penelope, with all the warmth of her hot little heart; and peace was at once restored.

But if Penelope had arisen in a warlike temper, her idol Polyphemus appeared, on the other hand, to be in a strange, sneakish state. All the morning he had been trying to sit on people's laps and get under their chairs. He always had a newspaper to sit on at meals; and now, though it was only half through breakfast, he was spread out upon it, close up to the side of Eve's chair, in a state of inflated and excessive bliss. The scene was as Arcadian as you please, for Polyphemus might have passed for a stage sheep, he was so large and woolly.

"Polyphemus is much better for the change of air," said Penelope.

"He's lookin' rippin'," said Mike.

"Oui, monsieur! Oui, madame!" cried mademoiselle in joyous accents, as she hovered about with a plate of hot rolls; "Polyphème est tout à fait rétabli dans sa santé. Voyez-vous comme il est gras." (Mademoiselle always said "g—r—r—ras," as if it was very fat in-

## POLYPHEMUS'S REVENGE 147

deed, fatter than fat.) "Son petit cœur est bien content ! Voyez-vous comme il sourit au bon soleil !"

For some reason or other mademoiselle's charming French sentiment always infuriated Penelope. Seizing her moment, "Mother," she cried, with great vehemence, "must mademoiselle keep a frog in our water-jug upstairs?"

"A frog?" said Eve and I together.

Mademoiselle turned crimson and darted a speaking glance in Penelope's direction.

"Yes, a frog. She talks to it when she goes to bed and when she gets up in the morning. And he gets out and about the floor, and I'm sure some day he will get into my bed, and then I should die."

"Or the frog !" said I.

"Oh, monsieur ! Oh, madame !" cried mademoiselle in agony ; "ne me privez pas de ma grenouille, je vous en prie ! C'est une si charmante petite bête, et si intelligente ! Elle me

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connait, j'en suis sure. Je trouve que c'est très mal élevé de mademoiselle Pénélope de ne pas l'aimer, et il faut dire qu'elle cherche toute occasion de la mettre en colère !”

“Penelope tickles the frog in the jug with her toothbrush,” said Mike, grinning, “and mademoiselle shrieks and cries, ‘Oh, ma chérie!’ Mademoiselle is very kind to him, and catches flies for him. I tell Penelope she has the plagues of Egypt in her bedroom, and it makes her wild !”

“I think,” said Eve mildly, “you are a nasty little boy, Master Mike. And I think Penelope ought not to tickle the frog or tease mademoiselle. And as for you,” she went on, turning to that young person, “don’t you think we might find another place for the frog to live besides your water-jug?”

“Mais, madame,” said mademoiselle combatively, “elle est si bien dans cette cruche !”

The further course of this debate was interrupted by a sudden irruption of our friend the



## POLYPHEMUS'S REVENGE 149

cock thrush, who, followed by his mate, flew chattering loudly into our tree. In passing, he had almost threatened to alight on Polyphemus's head, so that all exclaimed; and I could not help ejaculating, "What a passion the little beggar is in this morning!"

At the first onslaught Polyphemus crept trembling under Eve's chair; the cock thrush, apparently quite indifferent to our presence, flew on to the nearest branch of willow; then, perched quite near us, he and his mate began a perfectly deafening shriek and chatter, scolding us as if their hearts would burst.

"Really," cried Eve, "what can be the matter?—they seem to be in a frenzy. I shall have to go indoors. I cannot bear such a noise," and she rose from her seat.

Hardly had she taken two steps when she exclaimed, "Oh, dear me! whatever is that in the grass over there?" and turned hastily in the direction she had pointed.

We all followed. Polyphemus fled, an image

of guilty terror, at a cringing gallop into the house; the thrushes pursued him all the way, yelling like twin furies and swooping at him right up to the very doorstep. No doubt they were as terrible to him as Dr. Watts's eagles and ravens must have been to the imagination of the undutiful child of half a century ago.

When we stood by Eve, the poor birds' passion was explained. On the lawn, scattered in the grass at her feet, were some small, spotted feathers and a pitiful little bird's wing—all that was left to tell of Polyphemus's revenge. He had breakfasted on the first of the fledgelings who had tried the outer world. For two days Polyphemus was without a friend in the world except Penelope, who took him for serious exercise in the paddock; the rest of the time he was shut up in the back kitchen.

For two days three monstrously fat baby-thrushes hopped and ran about the flower-beds, guarded by their heroic parents, who, I am sure, had got no sleep for a fortnight. On the third

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morning they were gone clean away, and we never saw them again. But for days afterwards Polyphemus went in fear of his life, and suffered as much nervous torment as any Tsar of the Russias.

Thomas Matt was delighted.

“That 'ere cypress cat o' yourn,” he remarked, chuckling, “for all he be so wonderful big, he have no heart at all. He be no match for a little bit o' a Leysham thrush!”

## CHAPTER XXVII

### TRATTLES

**I**T was Miss Clipsby who, on the last but one occasion, when she happened to call just about tea-time, unluckily persuaded us to engage young William Trattles as "Buttons" to the establishment.

"His mother," said she, "washes for the Rectory. You may have noticed how beautifully got up Dr. Basfleet's surplices always are, and I must say that when young William was one of my scholars at the Sunday-school, he was the neatest-looking boy in the class. I remember dear Dr. Basfleet noticing him more than once. To be sure the Farnels found him rather tiresome, but then what Mrs. Farnel calls Dr. Farnel's nerves made the poor child un-

easy. You can guess, my dear, what Dr. Farnel's nerves really are. Dear Dr. Basfleet says . . . but there, I declare I never do gossip, and never shall. His mother says he is a most affectionate boy, always won by kindness. And there he is at home now, with nothing to do, and depending on good Mrs. Trattles's washing, and the dear little suit he brought off from Mrs. Farnel's with him, running to waste . . . tho', to be sure" (here Miss Clipsby permitted herself something like a titter), "poor Willim's figure has always inclined to embonpwang, and Dr. Farnel declared his waist began under his chin, and the tailor complained dreadfully when he made the little shoot." (Miss Clipsby, it may be observed here, suffered from what Eve called "pronunciations," which affected a few words in her vocabulary. We imagined they must be hereditary, and due to her coming of such a very good old Norfolk family.)

\* \* \* \* \*



Within three days William Trattles arrived in the little suit complete. One's first impression of it was of an enormous number of buttons, besides which he appeared to be furnished with a greater number of protuberances than any boy I ever saw. His face was secondary to his suit, for his suit had all the appearance of having been made first. It was freckled. His features were stuck about at random, like currants in a Norfolk dumpling. His head was enlivened with spikes of hair and two spirited ears. His eyes were grey and sparkling. His voice revealed an unexpected buzz and squeak, which had a pleasant kind of Band of Hope drum-and-fife effect.

One strange thing we observed was that the moment Mike and William encountered, their eyes gleamed on each other with a sudden unhallowed perception of each other's possibilities. A hideous sympathy was that very moment established between them. They lived in a circle of boyish understanding, from which

poor Penelope was shut out, an exclusion which, as a minx of spirit, she keenly resented.

Good Mrs. Trattles had sent up a message that first afternoon that William was a delicate boy and unfit for any exertion. Popay was most indignant, and immediately set the poor child to polish fifteen pairs of boots and shoes which she had been hoarding up for him. But Eve's motherly heart was touched.

"How," said she, "would I like Mike to go like that into a strange house, covered with buttons and with no one to love him?"

This was unanswerable, and it was, besides, pleasant to see the gentle solicitude with which Eve inducted the large-eared scamp into his duties. But you might as well have tried to get a hold upon a Norfolk wind as upon Trattles. Whenever he was wanted he was not to be found. The fact is that when he was sent on a message into the village, the boy laid leg to ground and betook himself to his own proper hamlet of Hurnsby, two and a half miles off.

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Somewhere or other he had the skeleton of a full-sized bicycle without tyres, and as the number of his buttons made him very conspicuous, we were continually getting news of his strange appearances at an incredible distance from home. But this inconvenience was nothing compared with the dismay that was caused when Mike began to be missing too.

One morning, about ten days after Trattles's installation, mademoiselle arrived in a state of frenzy with spread palms. Mike had, she said, been so ungenteel she could do nothing with him.

"He vill vistle to zat Tr—r—rattles from ze vindow and call, 'Vill—am, Vill—am,' and pull ze tongue at me. Ah, ah! And now he have run away!"

With that mademoiselle burst into a flood of tears, and announced her intention of returning to France.

Eve immediately despatched me in pursuit,

and I had not far to seek, for as I strolled along the road I heard a great noise from the direction of the sea. Then out of the distance I saw dawn a fore-shortened donkey, with a compound rider who apparently had

4 legs,  
4 arms,  
1 head,  
1 body,  
2 voices.

Greatly alarmed, I stepped behind a tree, and soon had the pleasure of resolving the spectacle into Mike and Trattles riding Diogenes at a walloping gallop towards home.

Much relieved and reflecting on the wholesome reception that awaited them, I went on towards the sea. When I got back and passed by the dining-room door, I heard a miserable sniffing within. It came from one of the corners, where I perceived Mike in a pious-penal position.

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"Hello, Mike!" I said. "What were you doing down at the sea?"

Mike looked round at me, scowling quite savagely. "We wasn't in the sea," said he.

"Where were you, then?"

"We was on the beach."

"What were you doing on the beach?"

Encouraged by my mild demeanour and seized by the urgency of his recollections, Mike came forth, imperceptibly edging his way out of his corner.

"I tell you," he said, "William is clever. He took my old tin horse and climbed up the cliff, and stuck it in a swallow-hole, and we was shying stones at it. It was most marvellous all the times William's stones hit!"

"What did you do with the donkey?"

"Oh, he was all right, eating sand. And can I come out of my corner?"

"My dear Mike," said I, "you are already out of your corner."

At that moment Eve entered the room with



such a tragical expression of countenance that Mike was seized with a great howl of grief, and



plunged head first into her arms; where I thought it best to leave him.

It was not on this occasion that Eve dismissed Trattles; nor yet that afternoon when

Mrs. Brinsby Topham called, and was answered by him, "Yes, ma'am, she is at home; but she isn't fit to be seen." Simply because poor Eve had a headache.

No; it was on that terrible day when the Rector was so kind as to take us up as we were walking back from the nearest broad. As we drove down the village street, we encountered the veteran Agas Goose, his eyes nearly starting out of his head with merriment.

"Marnin', reverent; marnin', ma'am," he shouted; "yew'll happen acrost a fine sight above on ta gaät. I'd give them urchins a sound good twiltin' if I was you. Enjoyin' their poipes, be they? It's a good thackin' they'll get, I told 'em——"

\* \* \* \* \*

Poor Mike fretted so much after William Trattles that Eve promised that the long-deferred visit to Yarmouth should take place the following Wednesday.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THE RIDE TO YARMOUTH

YARMOUTH was our Yarrow. All the summer we had left it unvisited. Now at last we were to prove whether or no it were the paradise, something *canaille* in character, of which we had heard such conflicting reports. On the one hand, we had been told of trainloads of Yahoos thither bound, who even in their rapid passage scared the decent, quiet towns they travelled through. On the other hand, Yarmouth was evidently the village Mecca. All the promising young men from Leysham went to Yarmouth, and came back with watches. Young women journeyed thither with immense bows in their hats, and returned smiling candidates for matrimony.

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Such fortune could never be Eve's and mine. Our hopes were of a — I was going to say, milder character, but that is not the word. What we really did want to see was the Yarmouth bloater in its proper scenery.

We had decided to bicycle there and back; and this meant fifty miles, the longest distance Eve had ever ridden. Mademoiselle and the children were to accompany us in an open waggonette. We fixed an extravagantly early hour for the starting out—seven a.m. This was politic, for it enabled us actually to leave The Leys at nine.

At half-past eight we were all assembled upon the lawn in apparent readiness. Thomas Matt stood rooted like a cabbage in the middle of a flower-bed, gazing stolidly at us. Mademoiselle stiffly whisked Penelope about by the hand; both of them looking very smart indeed in clean frocks. At an upper window appeared Popay, smothered in grief and a dazzling pocket-handkerchief. Popay had been already

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six times to Yarmouth, and steady as she was, appeared inconsolable that we should go there without her. At the back gate was a cart loaded with floury sacks; a white bull-terrier sat on the box-bench, holding the reins in his mouth, and though we could not see him very plainly, we knew he was craning forward to get a good view of us. He was the miller's dog, and he sorted particularly well with the miller's man, the one supplying all the vivacity and social quality that the other lacked.

Lunch baskets, shawls, umbrellas, great-coats, and other little necessities being safely placed on board the waggonette, I proceeded to assist Mike into his place beside the driver. As soon as I had well got hold of him, the extraordinary consistence of the child alarmed me. He wriggled like an eel, but he was as heavy as lead, and as padded as a hippopotamus. Having hauled him down, I searched his pockets. The little beggar had long looked forward to this expedition, and here are some



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of the personal effects with which he had provided himself, and which I obliged him to disgorge.

- 1 air-pistol,
- 1 box of explosive caps (intended  
for another weapon),
- 1 pocket-book,
- 1 dead linnet,
- 1 fishing rod,
- 1 tobacco pipe,
- 1 box of matches,
- 30 favourite stones,
- 1 spade and pail,
- 1 table-knife,
- 4 earthworms for bait.

Every item of this collection was debated by Mike with considerable fury. Penelope joined in the debate with so much feeling that I suggested to Eve that she should make a perquisition. And it was well she did, for Polyphemus was discovered smothered in a bag

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under a seat of the waggonette; while under the cushion was a scented-soap box full of caterpillars.

"My dear child," said Eve, "they will die shut up in that very strong smell. See, they have no air."

"My beloved ma," said Penelope firmly, "they have no noses, and cannot smell. So how can they die?"

However, at last these little differences of opinion were adjusted, the waggonette was comfortably packed, and we started.

The roads were smooth and white and level. The wind was northerly, and at our backs. This meant that we scudded along at a sparkling pace on our bicycles, easily outdistancing the waggonette. As we gazed along the level lands we saw an ecclesiastical perspective of many leagues, like nothing we had ever seen before, and consisting of a series of diminishing church towers. Shall I say sixteen, eighteen, twenty?—the twentieth just coquetting

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with the horizon. They were much better than milestones, and seemed more frequent. We had no sooner sped past one than another appeared at the turn of the road; very often it stood in a forlorn, unvillaged loneliness, with nothing but a plump vicarage a little way off to countenance it.

Those that nearly approached the sea edge had very high towers, evidently intended to serve as landmarks to ships. On the landward side the towers decreased in height, appearing squat by contrast with their taller brethren. Most of these churches were of the usual mud and flint Norfolk type, bleakly posted on some bit of rising ground. Some few were beautiful. One in especial we remember, that stood sheltered in a wood; a fine church, with a thatched roof, and walls covered with climbing roses. The churchyard was green and kindly cared for, and as rural as White's Selborne. In strong contrast was another church not far away, a large building on top of a hill. With-

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in, the roof was entirely of carved dark oak, studded with flights of winged and painted angels. Below, the floor of uneven flags, the poor rows of pews, the broken screen, the mildewed walls, all were alike neglected.

"It is paradise above, and the catacombs below," whispered Eve.

"Or like a miser housed in a palace," said I, and with a last look at the wonderful angel roof we slipped thankfully out of the chill air into the sunshine. Some miles further on we decided to wait for the children, "For Heaven only knows," said Eve, "what dreadful thing they may be doing."

Accordingly we perched ourselves on a stile outside a church surrounded by a vast turnip field. Presently we heard in the distance a sound of cherubic voices, blending with the sighing of the seaside airs in the turnip leaves. Over the roll of the wheels the words were by-and-by wafted to us—

"On descendit à la cuisine,  
On descendit à la cuisine,  
En sauce blanche, blanche, blanche, il fut mangé . . ."

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"How delightful!" said Eve. "They are quite good. What a comfort! Let us hurry on."

We did hurry on; and then we came to a broad—Coaksby Broad—the flattest piece of water in the world, with a thin strip of meadow and sedge, and one elongated cow between its remotest reach and the sky. Eve was in rapture at the sight; she jumped off her bicycle with such suddenness that my machine came near discharging me into the broad, which in the most amicable way was lapping the very high-road.

Hard by we saw a long, wooden boat-landing, very cool for sitting upon and dangling one's dusty shoes near the water. There we sat and pretended we were young and foolish again with no Mike and Penelope to solidify our consciences. In this happy state were we when we heard again the rumble of wheels. Nemesis approached. We assumed a parental gravity of demeanour, and not a moment too soon; in



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a second more we distinguished the frantic jabbering of mademoiselle and the rollicking rejoinders of the children. When the waggonette came up, lo and behold, Mike and Penelope riding joyously and most riskily on the



lower back step of the vehicle, and struggling for the best place, while mademoiselle excitedly attempted to dislodge them and drag them into the body of the vehicle by main force. It sufficed for me merely to saunter out into the road, when immediately, as if by magic, Mike and Penelope were to be seen demurely seated in the body of the waggonette, with very red

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faces, and their hats on crooked. Mademoiselle shut to the door with a clap, and as she very decently made no complaints, but folded her hands and gazed upon us with a wide, professional smile, we suffered the little party to trot unmolested out of our sight.

"I think," said Eve, "we had better follow them. I do not like their looking too much like a travelling menagerie on the road; and you cannot tell what they are going to do next."

But when we came up the spirit of the little party was completely changed. Mike and Penelope were in that inquiring, philosophical mood which leads to some of the most trying passages that parents ever suffer from their offspring.

"In the beginning of the world," said Mike, leaning out of the waggonette and speaking in a high, clear voice, "savages could not be married, for there was no clergyman. However did they manage to get children?"

Fortunately it was Penelope who interfered.

"No, Mike," she said, with the accent of

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authority, "that is not the wonder ; this is it : There must have been a first baby ; now, who was it that nursed him ?"

\* \* \* \* \*

All the rest of the way Eve appeared thoughtful and *distracte*. Even when I announced at last the distant smoke cloud that hung over Yarmouth she took little or no interest.

"Oh, is that Yarmouth?" she said in an everyday, adventure-killing tone. "Really, do you know, the more I think of Penelope's idea the more puzzled I get. Who did nurse the first baby?"

"Surely," said I, "a strange question for an Eve to ask!"

## CHAPTER XXIX

### YARMOUTH

THE last few miles across the endless Caister flats almost killed us. And not so much from fatigue as from the desolate hideousness of the scene. On the right were sad, grey marshes, before us the long, level road, the grey smoke, and immense chimneys of Yarmouth; on the left was the dismantled hulk of a windmill looking as bluebottles used to look after Mike had done with them; on the left, too, was the only relief, a glimpse of the always magnificent North Sea. This piece of the road lengthened as we went, and appeared to take longer to traverse than all the rest of the journey put together. However, it was over at last.

I called out to Eve in a vast relief, "See, we are in at last!" But she made no reply. Her eyes were fixed on her front wheel, and by her expression I knew she, like myself, was still meditating Penelope's awful riddle—

"Who nursed the first baby?" And as a corollary—"Who sat on the first egg?"



Before we had reached the market-place Eve and I had definitely abjured Darwin and his *Origin of Species*, and believed as devoutly in the garden of Eden and Adam and Eve as any Rector of Leysham.

Curiously enough, while we were waiting in the market-place for the waggonette to come up,



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whom should we see but the Rector in an open carriage, disappearing round a corner ! We thought of pursuing him, but feared to miss the waggonette.

We had a moment or two before it joined us in which to look about. The market was thronged with an immense motley crowd of people not like any crowd we had seen before. East-country folk, foreign sailors, people with Dutch faces, people with gipsy faces, streamed up and down the alleys that ran between the four great rows of covered booths. Their clothes were of every shade of brown and seedy black, drab green, and sailor blue. Hardly a pretty woman's face was to be seen, but there were some strange and even powerful types ; the men were stout and fairly hearty-looking, and comelier than the women. There was a general air of poverty well-to-do, and not too particular. The whole scene belonged to another England than that which we knew ; it might have walked straight out of a picture of

Hogarth's—if Hogarth had ever been to Yarmouth.

We were still trying to explain the sensation of the scene to each other, when mademoiselle and the children drove up, hilarious, and burning to be on the beach of whose wonders Leysham never spared talking.

Thither, then, we made our way; and if the market-place beggared description, what shall we say of the beach, which was not in the least like Hogarth, but like one of the forgotten visions of Mr. Frith?

A pandemonium for us, it was a paradise for its chosen. Here was another world from the market-place—a rout of ten thousand, culled from a hundred distant towns, thoroughly enjoying every square inch of the beach, and each other's society. The hubbub that went up from this multitude along the borders of the sea was indescribable. At last we managed to find a vacant square yard upon which we shot mademoiselle and the children within hearing

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of a band of harps and violins, a party of nigger minstrels, and different voluble commercial interests. Eve began to murmur. "My dear," I said, "you faithfully promised them this exquisite treat. Leave 'em alone, and it will do 'em good." With that I bestowed the entire picnic-basket upon the radiant mademoiselle, who was clasping her hands and crying, "Ah, que c'est gai! Quel bonheur pour nous, mes chers petits enfants!" and hastily removed Eve to a hotel.

What went on at the hotel I need not say. Enough that Eve entered there dusty and tired out, and emerged radiant and equal to fresh adventures.

But what was our consternation on returning to the beach to find—mademoiselle, with a nun in regulation black and white holding either hand, and the tears streaming down her face, while they all three talked French with one voice and the same breath.

The two nuns were in charge of some two

thousand young hopefuls from Sheffield or Wolverhampton, or some such place. At first we could not see Mike and Penelope, but at length in a ring of the nuns' charges we discovered them. Mike was showing two boys



how to stand on their hands and kick off a shoe. Penelope was so lost in admiration for a dirty little boy in black velvet that she could not divert her eyes to her parents.

There was an appalling atmosphere of friendliness and good fellowship everywhere. As I approached Mike, a young fellow, with his hat

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on the back of his head and a girl on his arm, stopped in front of me.

"This is my best girl, sir," he said. "What do you think of her?"

The young woman was so indescribably decorated that at first I could do nothing but gape. Then hastily saying, "She's too handsome, my good fellow; for your own sake, I beg you to take her away," I seized upon Mike, and telling mademoiselle we would call for her in an hour, Eve and I got the children into a trap and drove off to the Fish Market.

After the scene we had just been through, the calm repose and beauty of the Fish Market appeared almost religious. The ground was carpeted in shining scales. The ranks of brown wicker baskets, that stretched a quarter of a mile, were piled with glimmering fish, making a sheet of greenish silver all along the stone quay. There was enough fish to feed the world.

Below in the river were the fishing-smacks,



with mountains of herrings and grey salt upon their decks; great ruddy-faced fishermen in yellow clothes, that looked as if they had been made expressly for the flood, were moving leisurely about or shovelling fish.

"What's that stuff the fish is in?" I asked a hoary sailor in blue with a back like a table.

"That be tha swill," he said.

"And how do you sell them?" I asked.

"You can't get them here for love or money. This fish do go to all parts."

When at last we came away, we agreed that the handsomest and the best bred thing we had seen in Yarmouth was the Yarmouth bloater.

All this time the uncommon dignity of demeanour preserved by Mike and Penelope made us very well aware how they regarded our conduct in tearing them from the joys of the beach. Therefore we set them to gallop along the rows, those amazing alleys which serve Yarmouth for streets, and which are so narrow that Mrs. Lovell and Mrs. Bozwell can

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shake hands out of their parlour windows across the street. For the rows are the Park Lane of the gipsy colony in Yarmouth.

As soon as they had exhausted this diversion, and had lost or forgotten the little stiffness about the beach, we took them off to the quays to see the shipping. Then a really extraordinary thing happened.

As we were getting out of our vehicle, whom should we see but the Rector and Miss Clipsby walking along arm in arm and talking earnestly together. Miss Clipsby had on a wonderful hat, that looked as if it had been made for somebody else, and could have no relation to her past, present, or future. Of course, we were delighted to see them, though the Rector certainly did look a little queer. Miss Clipsby said at once that they had been down to look at a Norwegian barque that was unloading a cargo of ice; they had stood so long that the Rector had caught a chill from looking at the ice, and she was afraid it might be influenza.

We suggested at once that they should come to our hotel, and that we might all have tea together ; but the Rector said that Miss Clipsby, whom he had met by chance, was going home by the next train, and that he had a business appointment.



We were so much alarmed at the thought of the ice-ship, and the influenza, that we decided to drive back and fetch mademoiselle, give them all a good sound tea, and start for home. The little boy in black velvet had certainly looked healthy enough, but we might not come so well out of the next adventure.

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Eve was so done up that, abandoning the children to their waggonette, we took the train home. How they amused themselves on the road Heaven only knows, but when we received them at the gate, exactly twelve hours from the time of starting, they appeared quite fresh, and vowed they had never enjoyed anything so much.

\* \* \* \* \*

The same evening Eve, according to her custom, sat on a low-cushioned seat in the window, with her head leaning against the window-shutter. It was bedtime. All of the night that the open window showed was black and still and sweet; nothing moved but the bats. It was a complete contrast to the brilliant light and racket of the day.

"Well," said Eve at last, breaking a long silence, "it was a wonderful day of sunshine and out-of-doors. But there are one or two things that stick in my mind's eye, and I should like to get rid of them by telling you."

"Tell, then," I answered, knowing Eve's fancy that any troublesome thought is to be got rid of by depositing it in a friendly bosom.

"Well," said she, "I saw fat fields and large, comfortable houses and regiments of churches. And by the roadside I saw a printed sign—a great, staring one, "This way to Coaksby Workhouse."

"So did I," I answered. "And what next?"

"I saw a garden quite full of flowers, and a woman's face like a death-mask in black drapery, looking over the wall in the sun."

"I saw her too, but indeed I hoped you did not. Is there anything else?"

"I saw," said Eve, "the devil looking out of one of the Yarmouth rows."

"Well," said I, "I thought I smelt brimstone myself here and there. Poverty, disease, and the devil; no wonder you kept so quiet, with such a trio to think about. But now, are you all right again?"

"Quite," said Eve. "I shall go to bed and



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dream of harvest-fields and long, clean roads and a bright blue sea. And to-morrow I shall go down and read the newspaper to the old people in the almshouses. And I know three sick people I can take soup and things to. But about the devil—what can I do there?"

"He is more difficult to deal with," said I, feeling something at a loss. "How would you like to make a beginning by getting a nice long petticoat upon old Nancy?"

But Eve laughed and sighed and shook her head all at once, and so went to bed.

## CHAPTER XXX

### ADIOGENES IN PARADISE

IT was the perfect time of roses; at last, Eve's garden had reached that bloom and perfection of colour and fragrance that Eve, a rose-idolater, had dreamt of by night and paid for by day.

One lovely soft summer evening, in which Spain would seem to have visited Norfolk, Eve said to me, "To-morrow morning the darling Rouge-et-noir will be fully out. For once I shall get up before you to have an early morning walk among the roses."

But habit was too strong. At six o'clock I awoke, and, remembering the roses, smiled to see how Eve still slept. I was mean enough to dress very quietly, that I might have the

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chance to show my moral superiority once more. I was just putting away my razors, when a noise, quite out of the common run of garden noises, reached my ears from the without. I stepped to the window, already open, and putting my head out, remained petrified with astonishment.

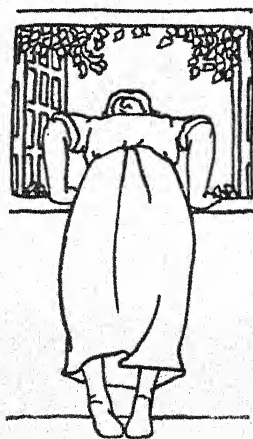
It was Diogenes.

The first thing to catch my eye was his unnatural head staring out of one of the arches of the pergola. A look of beatific foolishness was on his face. From his jaws, made for thistles and braying, protruded a freshly culled spray of roses, which the beastly epicure was munching.

Recovering myself, I began, with great presence of mind, to shout from the window and wave my arms. The shout must have awoken Eve, for next moment her head was beautifully projecting from the next window. When she saw the cause of the outcry, perceiving that Diogenes had put her very identical idea into

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practice, she raised a long-drawn, dolorous cry that would have gone to anybody's heart; when, lo and behold, reflectively marching along, Thomas Matt in his shirt-sleeves, inspecting the edge of his hoe. As soon as he



arrived level with the end of the pergola he raised his eyes to the top windows of the house, every one of which was now garnished with a staring head. Then, turning, he saw Diogenes, and came to a full stop, seized evidently with a paralytic calm.

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While this lasted I was afraid for the man's reason. Then, Heaven—Heaven be praised, he spat! Firmly grasping his hoe, he uttered a base, deliberate roar and bore down upon Diogenes.

That philosopher gave his ears a roguish wag and withdrew them for a moment from our view. Only for a moment. He reappeared quickly at a full trot down the pergola, Thomas Matt in hot pursuit, emitting language as he ran.

"Dam t' darty dickey! Let aa be at thee, tha darty mo—o—ak!"

The last syllable grew into a roar which all Leysham must have heard, and which was accompanied by a terrific thwack upon Diogenes' hinder end with the hoe.

Instantly Fate led mademoiselle to the rescue. A treble shriek of anguish in French was heard beginning outside the nursery door, and descending through the house until it emerged—I think through the



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drawing-room window — suddenly upon the lawn.

Thomas Matt had meanwhile been showing



an amazing agility for a man of his stiff maturity and build. He had succeeded in turning Diogenes, and was heading him back for the pergola, when mademoiselle, her hair

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done as if for the purpose, and attired in a pink-striped dressing-gown and the most remarkable *chaussures*, appeared upon the grass.

"Ah, mon frère!" she cried, as she came on. "Fi donc! He zall not . . . ah, cruel vieillard, what you do to my poor Diogène?"

Thomas Matt never could abear a "furriner." He now grounded his hoe and halted, with one humorous, malicious eye taking in every window of the house front.

"May I ast, ma'am," said he, with rustic irony, "how long have yew bin havin' a pound a week and your overtime?"

"Monsieur," said mademoiselle, with fluency and politeness, "je vous assure que je ne comprend pas votre espèce d'Anglais. C'est inutile de me regarder avec vos yeux de grenouille. Je vous dis que personne ne doit toucher à Diogène excepté moi."

"You're a shany mawther, sure enough," answered Thomas Matt, menacing made-

moiselle with a paternal forefinger. "Go yew back into the house an' lave the dickey to me, or I'll larn you wit to maddle wi' oi!"

As the combatants glared at each other, each of them equally victorious and comprehensible in their own opinion, Eve and I with one voice called upon them. Mademoiselle fled into the house, and Thomas Matt, apparently refreshed by this delivery of himself, returned to the chase.

Diogenes, profiting by the short truce, was now pasturing on a standard rose bush in the middle of the lawn. When disturbed he capered away with a playful fling of his heels, and once more made for cover under the pergola, whither Thomas Matt pursued him at a round trot, keeping up as he ran a kind of rumbling recitative in the intervals of throwing the hoe with great goodwill at the head of Diogenes, as thus:—

"I'll larn you wit to come and ate my roses, you old sarpint!"

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(Here the hoe narrowly missed its mark and fell foul of another rose tree, which it snapped asunder.)

"Lawks-a-mercy! if that bain't another. Won't you stop, you old warmin, till you hev spoilt every one o' my roses?"

(Diogenes, as if charmed at the invocation, here appeared at a new opening, and flung once more, heels up, across the lawn.)

"Hum, he, he!"

(Here Thomas Matt grinned in a kind of agony.)

"He's a queer old dickey, and no mistake. Woa, now! woa! Woa, wi' yer, yer old sinner!"

Eve and I listened breathlessly; we had promised our friend Peter Flyght, the folklorist, to make a note of all the really good Norfolk words we came across, and we hoped for much from this soliloquy.

So it was with real regret that we saw Thomas Matt's assistant arrive. He being a

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young man particularly fitted by nature to comprehend and deal with asses, in a moment the merry chase was over, and the trio had disappeared.



## CHAPTER XXXI

### ACER NEGUNDO

EVE'S *penchant* for a finer art of flowers than that practised by Thomas Matt led her every now and again to attempt some imaginative new departure in the way of rock-gardens, wall-sowings, and other little devices which she got out of gardening books.

She was also frequently provoked to fresh experiments by the arrival of some flower and seed catalogue more fascinating than the common, for there seems to be, let me premise here, a sort of genial freemasonry among seed merchants, through which an order sent to one is sure to lead to the arrival of a dozen catalogues from others, from all corners of the British Isles.

But all Eve's attempts to bring Thomas Matt



into working accord with her ideas, when these were in any way attractive or original, were met

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by him with the same portentous shooting out of his lobster lip.

Endlessly ingenious as she was in the management of her fellow-creatures, Eve had as yet made no effect upon Thomas Matt. It was one of my favourite after-breakfast diversions, when I was supposed to be deeply absorbed in my *magnum opus* on a New Variety of Diatom, to light a morning pipe and listen to these garden colloquies between Mind and Matter. It was like a Rose talking to a Turnip.

"Now, Thomas Matt," I heard Eve saying one morning, "I must have some lighter-foliage against that dark yew. I am going to have a clump there of *Acer Negundo*. I shall want you to make a nice bed for them; you will have to dig full four feet deep."

"Hazer Begumto?" asked Thomas Matt in his slowest tone of deliberately studied ignorance.

"Yes, *Acer Negundo*! You know, those variegated maples."

"Them spotty maples!" said Thomas Matt; "they be no kinder use in this 'arth, and wi' these winds. I know this soil and this soil know me. In course I'll put 'em in the gr'und and find a carner for them, ma'am, but they'll die there like a jerane in a frost. No, no. There be only one bit o' a maple tree in this part, and that be growed by a ole wumman, the better o' four mile from here; and that be because she be a cunning old mawther, and have a gard'n in a hole of trees."

"Really," said Eve, partly vexed, and partly curious about the old woman.

"Ay," said Thomas Matt. "Mebbe you'm heard tell of her. Some do call her the Herb-woman of Hurnsby. She be terr'ble clever; I'd a sight sooner take her medicine stuffs than any doctor's. But she be terr'ble cross. If so be as you do go that way, don't you take little master and mistress near the ole mawther. She can't abide the sight of a child; she'd so soon look at a child as I would at a ghost."

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Diatoms were nothing to Thomas Matt once he had got fairly under weigh. Putting down my pipe, I issued out to join the ghost-seer.

"Hullo, Matt," said I, "you don't mean to say you're afraid of a ghost?"

Thomas Matt was nonplussed by my sudden appearance. He always required a certain time to attune his ears, as it were, and readjust himself to a fresh interlocutor. Carefully turning himself some two inches towards me, after some thought he answered cautiously—

"I won't say but what I do know what it be to wish myself at home on a dark night."

"But, Thomas Matt," said I, "surely there are no ghosts about Leysham?"

But Thomas, careful for the reputation of his native village, was not going to admit so much as that. "I don't know," he said, "but what strange things have a-bin seen in Leysham. One night young Martin Cupid he were a goin' home wi' his mother and his other brother. And all of a sudden he felt his back grown



cold. And he looked behind him, and there were a white impet, or summit white, a-follerin' them along the road. His mother were a terr'ble timid wumman, and he dursn't tell her a word, and he took her home and shut the door."

"Was anything more seen?" asked Eve.

"Praise be to the Almighty," said Thomas Matt, "nothin' more were seen. Martin Cupid, he got his mother in the house and shut the door. She were such a terr'ble timid wumman, I belave, if he had a-telled her, she'd a died upo' the spot."

"Hasn't anyone else but Martin Cupid seen a ghost?" asked Eve.

Thomas Matt considered for a while. "Well," he said at last, "there were a terr'ble wicked old man lived down in the village, the last house but one before ye come to the Farmby road. That were a wicked old man, and one night, after he were dead and laid in his grave, there were a wumman comin' along, and there

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she see him scufflin' and waddlin' and coughin' along the road like as if he was alive. If you'll belave me, four men had to take that wumman home, and not a wumman in the village will go nigh that house in the dark."

Eve and I thought this quite a good story, but still we hoped for something more.

"Did anybody else see the wicked old man?" asked Eve.

"That were all that saw him," said Thomas Matt tranquilly, preparing to go down upon his knees to attack a garden bed.

"And is that all the ghosts there are in Leysham?" I asked.

Thomas Matt considered afresh while remaining in a kind of half-way attitude, his hands upon his knees. "Aw, dare," he said at last, "there were a man, a friend o' mine. And that were raly a brave man too, and a gud gard'ner. An' he were comin' one dark night acrost Farmby Common. And there were somethin' allays a-follerin' up behind him. 'If I die for

it,' he say to himself, 'I'll see what the ghost raly be.' And he went up and got a hold of it, and sure enough, it were nothin' but a old ass! He were raly a brave man, and what did a do but a rode home upon its back! Ha! ha! ha!"

After which explosion Thomas Matt resumed his professional expression, and proceeded to get down on to his knees.

A week afterwards, when a vile sea-wind was withering up the newly planted Acer Negundos, Eve, declaring it was always best to face a cold wind, proposed a walk along the beach, for a fine sea was running. We went along at a resolute speed for an hour and more, when suddenly the rain descended in a heavy squall. We beat a retreat thereupon up a "gap" and along a sandy lane for about half a mile, when we came upon a cottage in a sort of scoop at the corner of an uneven field. About it was a quite respectable thicket of twisted hawthorns, sycamores, and dwarfed and sea-stunted ash

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trees ; in front was a garden full of surprisingly brilliant bloom.

One tree in the snuggest corner of all caught Eve's eye.

"That is the variegated maple," she said.  
"This must be Hurnsby, and here is the cottage where the herb-woman lives."

## CHAPTER XXXII

### THE WISE WOMAN OF HURNSBY

**I**T so much surprised us to see all the colour that was spread out around and upon this small cottage that we stood still at the gate, in spite of the rain. Every inch of the little garden was packed with plants, one blossoming against another. The cottage was tapestried in late red roses, which nodded in the flights of wind that escaped through the little thicket of trees; most wonderful of all, even those Norfolk gusts that reached us across the garden smelt as sweet as honey.

As we stood in the rain at the gate, debating an entrance, the house door suddenly opened, and an old woman stood within it. She had a large, pale, forbidding countenance; but in spite



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of it, Eve took heart of grace, and hastening up to her, begged her to give us shelter from the rain. The woman said nothing in answer to the request, but turned and walked within the kitchen, leaving the door open. We took this for a hint ; Eve followed her boldly in, and I brought up the rear.

Anything less like a witch's kitchen could not have been seen. It was tidy to a fault ; on every piece of furniture a desolate cleanliness prevailed. There was a dead-alive fire ; over it hung the only really appropriate property in the place, a monstrous three-legged pot—the true witch's cauldron—hitched on a crook. What would have been the pleasant detail of drying herbs hung along the whitewashed rafters was completely spoiled by their being all pinned up between sheets of whity-brown paper, with only the stalks sticking out.

Wet and weary, poor Eve was, I could see, as much depressed as I myself by so much

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repulsive cleanliness where we had looked for picturesque disorder. Still, as was her wont,



she tried to be pleasant; she stood at the window, and fell to admiring the garden, whose fragrance filled the little cottage. The woman

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remained passive, but when Eve mentioned Thomas Matt, she pursed up her lips at the name, and spoke for the first time.

"Thomas Matt be no gard'ner. He have no more feeling for a blossom than for a cabbage. He do look to his wage."

"And you, anyone can see," said Eve, "do it for love."

"I do love all growing things," said the woman soberly; "there baint no wickedness in them." There was a bitter significance in her tone as she spoke.

"But," said Eve, "there are poison plants, too."

"To be sure," said the woman, "and ill-spoken of they be. But there, they do hurt no one till they be pulled up out of their places. And it be well known, they do have most power to heal."

"You know all the herbs, as well as the flowers?" asked Eve.

"I have a gift to understand them," she

answered soberly; then, after pausing for a moment, she went slowly out of the kitchen on a heavy foot.

Eve came over, and sat down by the sulky fire to warm her dampness. Terrifically queer whiffs were coming out of the pot. Judge of our excitement, when a moment after we heard the suppressed rattle of teacups.

"It's impossible," said Eve under her breath. "It's too good to be true. Her face was about as hospitable as a brick when she looked at me."

I was so sure of my woman that I bet Eve half a crown against a new crocheted silk necktie that she was wrong. The rattling wind stormed outside and blew the rain in sheets along as we waited in a lively suspense. It was only a very few moments before the woman reappeared, and, standing in the door, pointed with her thumb over her shoulder.

"Here te be," she said.

We rose and followed her into a dark little

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sepulchre of a room made chill by a prodigious number of china ornaments, which even the wool mats they stood upon did not suffice to temper. A door from this room opened into a little shop, whose window we had remarked and out of which stole strange and not unpleasant odours. The door was a little open, and we could see shelves crowded with jars and bottles and packets.

And here we were expected to regale.

"This is very kind of you," said I in desperation. "But this lady's things are wet from the rain. Could we not have it in the kitchen?"

The woman stared wickedly at me, her large pale face looming larger with offence.

"That be your tea," she said. "Ye can take it or leave it," and she turned on her heel.

Horribly frightened, we crept into our places and settled ourselves at the whitest of tables set with yellow ware.



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To our surprise, the tea was delicious, recalling by contrast the tea of London "At Homes," which, with a few notable exceptions, would all seem to be brewed out of the same vast teapot. The cream was fresh skimmed and served without the admixture of size. The bread-and-butter was so good that we quarrelled under our breaths for the last piece, being afraid for our lives to ask for more ; and there was honey on the table and a china dish of barberry jelly, which seemed to be flavoured with all the flowers of summer and might have gratified the palate of a Roman emperor.

When we had eaten up everything and regained our courage, we ventured out into the silent kitchen ; but the mistress of the establishment was nowhere to be seen.

So, softly depositing a half-crown on the corner of the table, we took our departure, first pausing awhile to admire the extraordinary fertility of the garden, where the flowers were set together as close as grass stalks, and also

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to give our formidable hostess a chance of re-appearing.

Still she did not come. At last we made our escape through a gate and began to travel along the road in some relief of spirits. But a sound made us turn. The herbalist stood in her door, precisely as when we arrived. But her hand was raised, and from it came flying a silver coin that rang in the road—my half-crown.

I felt inclined to make a bolt for it, but Eve turned at once intrepidly and hastened back to the cottage. I saw her take the Wise Woman's hands in both hers as she stood in the door and speak earnestly to her.

"Well," said I when Eve rejoined me looking serious, "did you exorcise her?"

"She is a strange woman," answered Eve. "I am certain she has had a cruel history. I am going back to see her again. Can you imagine a granite rock trying to smile? I am going to write at once for things for her garden." Here I groaned, strictly in the spirit. The

radius of Eve's munificences was extending; here at last was the five-mile radius reached. And most likely the old Gorgon would throw the things in the road.

Eve walked along in silence for a time. Presently, however, she opened her hand and with a smile showed me something inside it. "There," she said, "am I not good? I picked it up to soothe her pride. And now you need not trouble about that bet you lost to me over the tea."

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### EAST WIND

**I**T was already the third week in September when the Colesby Browns left us. Eve and I had felt the entertaining of them to be something of a strain. They are charming people, and we agree in admiring them, they are so run to cleverness.

To be sure The Leys is small and inconvenient; still Eve and I do feel that Colesby Brown need not have refused to come in to dinner when we had especially asked the Rector to meet him. What made it worse was that he persisted in sitting in full view of the dining-room windows, reading a conspicuously comic paper, which he said was the only thing published nowadays which conveyed a sound criticism of life.

Anna Colesby Brown is a nice little woman, and seemed happy when the children were out of the way. Of course, it was unlucky that she should have crashed snails all the way down



to breakfast the very first morning, and that Penelope should have cried out in that strong Norfolk accent she has picked up so quickly, "Well, I did wonder where all my dodmans was got to in the night."



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What made it worse was the horrid way Mike was laughing to himself over his saucer of grapenuts. As Popay said the snails were not there early in the morning, we could not help feeling he must have had a hand in it. However, as I said, when the children were out of the way Mrs. Colesby Brown seemed very happy. Eve said what she really enjoyed was changing her diamonds, and taking them for drives, and she got plenty of that.

Charming people as they are, Eve and I could not help feeling relieved when they were gone. That evening I was sitting alone in my private sanctum, pleasing myself with a solitary cigar, and reflecting on the quiet month or six weeks I was going to have. Autumn is my favourite time of year; there is a calm peace in nature that stills the mind, and inclines it to spontaneous reflection. Just as I had reached the point of absolute comfort, mental and physical, I was startled by a sudden yell, about a hundred feet above my head in

a straight line. The wood fire that was burning in the grate responded by puffing out a volume of smoke and sparks into the middle of the room. Doors banged below, and the house shuddered. It was the East Wind.

The arrival of an east wind on the east coast may seem an ordinary event enough. Do not run away, however, with the idea that it is a common sort of east wind that visits Leysham. This particular wind is poured forth from some baleful, black, malefic star, and Leysham is the first spot on the globe on which it strikes. Else why that super-lunar yell? It was as distinct an arrival as a sky-stone.

That same night every tree in Leysham suffered a euthanasia; or, as perhaps I might better describe it, retreated downwards towards its root. Next morning the same, or almost the same, appearance of tree was there, but the leaves rattled like tinfoil; they were grey and blighted and curled, and struggled one and all to be down.

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That same morning every decent bird in the country was sitting on the telegraph wires, discussing an immediate departure. The day after there was hardly a bird to be seen. The fields changed colour to a kind of uniform grey, and the roads were bleached a stone-white. Popay's nose was red; mademoiselle shivered, and lost all her French gaiety; Polyphemus lay in a ball on the hearthrug.

For two days the east wind shrieked, and on the third it blew a hurricane. In the night all of it there was came down bodily and sat on the roof by tons. Early in the morning we got up and huddled all the winter things we could find. Then, diving head foremost into the wind, we fought our way down to the beach. What a sea change was there, from the summer fawns and blues! The sky was ink, the sea a lather of milk. Heaps of whitish foam lay at the foot of the mud cliffs, and ran in flocks hither and thither till they broke and scattered like thistle-down through the air.

Mike and Penelope were beside themselves with rapture. Eve had to take hold of the hem of Penelope's frock, and I of the tail of Mike's coat, and thus we were towed hither and thither, chiefly clinging to the long rushes and coarse sea-grasses that grew on the edges of the cliffs.

That day a turnip field, turnips and all, fell into the sea near Leysham, and many a garden bed received a baptism of foam. Every cottage for miles about was shut up as tight as an oyster on land, and no Christian soul was to be met on the deserted highways. Only along the cliffs infrequent coastguards and a few inquiring members of the laity were dotted, watching the distressed shipping far out in the "roads."

For three days, more or less, did that storm batter at the doors and windows. Nothing would cook properly with the east wind sitting on the top of every chimney; and at last my patience gave way.

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"My dear Eve," I said one evening, as I sat in a haze of wood smoke, "I can stand it no more. Even my pipe won't draw properly in this climate. The whole place is demoralised and demoralising. Legacy or no legacy, pack your boxes and let us go home the day after to-morrow."

Perhaps I was too peremptory. Eve turned red, her nostrils dilated, her eyes dropped grey sparks; she rose as if to quit the room. Then, and before I knew what she was about, the waste-paper basket was clapt down over my head, the lamp turned out, and I was left sitting in the dark.



## CHAPTER XXXIV

### THE EFFLORESCENCE OF MISS CLIPSBY

**I**N spite of the spirit of opposition which might have seemed to be symbolised by that *bonnet-de-nuit* with which Eve had endowed me, we finally agreed that the time to leave Leysham was come. It was the east wind, continually and abominably recurrent, that finally braced Eve to this resolution. For many days there was no comfort for man or beast out of doors.

Eve did her best to enjoy this weather. With a fortitude I could not but secretly admire, she took Mike and Penelope for long walks, and even insisted on sitting in the garden, with her work and her gardening books, on one terrible afternoon, while I watched with a dismal fore-

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boding. She kept misquoting Mr. Swinburne's superb ode ; as thus :—

"Are thy feet on the waste of the waters ?

Are thy wings on the winds of the wild North Sea ?"

But on the fifth day she began to waver and talked of schools. On the sixth day she began secretly to review our transport and held conference with mademoiselle ; she, it ought to be said, had drooped and dwindled visibly since the Yarmouth adventure. That same evening she revived and passed into an ecstasy. "*Mes petits chéris !*" she cried. "*En voyage ! il faut faire nos paquets !*" Eve told me that she had been exceedingly eloquent in the box-room about liberty and the virtues of the English nation. "*En France,*" she cried, "*la femme, ce n'est rien ! En Angleterre, elle est aussi respectée que l'homme ! Oh, j'aime les Anglais !*" And from that she fell to trimming hats with unimaginable ardour.

The children shared her joy ; but it was the thought of the railway station and going in a

train that affected them. Each in their own way they made preparations for departure. Penelope went about peering into cabbages and burrowing under stones for beetles and caterpillars with which she looked forward to enlivening a London winter. Mike's pockets rattled heavily with shells and "thunder-stones," curious fossils which the natives said it was unlucky to find. If that were so, then Mike must have been carrying away all the ill luck of Leysham in his pocket.

As for Popay, her operations were Napoleonic. She laid in a quantity of Leysham produce sufficient to victual a camp. In the store-room stood sacks of flour from Furmby Mill; on the shelves were hundreds of eggs, all laid that very morning; pots in regiments of the most delicious jams; and, alas! that we must add, as many pounds as she dared of horrible Norfolk butter. Popay had also acquired a couple of young Leysham novices, with very red cheeks and very stiff outlines, whose mettle she

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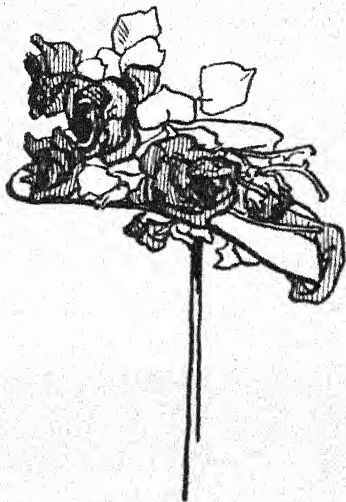
was anxious to prove at a distance from their families.

In the midst of so much expectation and preparation Miss Clipsby suddenly appeared one afternoon. She had on the identical hat we had seen at Yarmouth, her hair was actually frizzed, and she fidgeted all about the sofa in the most extraordinary manner.

Nothing that Eve said to her did she appear to understand, and she had quite lost her nice pleasant way of chatting on without any stops. When Eve said the weather seemed improving, Miss Clipsby said she was sorry to hear it; when Eve said we had decided to leave on Thursday, Miss Clipsby said it was a comfort.

At last Eve bethought her that she had received a letter that morning from her friend Mrs. Peter Flyght, who wished to spend a summer in Norfolk, saying a house-agent had mentioned Miss Clipsby's house as being to let for next summer. "Surely," said Eve, "it must be a mistake."

"Tee-hee!" said Miss Clipsby so suddenly that Eve jumped. But the next moment she had got out her pocket-handkerchief and burst into tears.



"I am so thankful, so thankful!" she sobbed.  
"It is to be next January!"

Eve stared, much embarrassed, and said,  
"What?" or something to that purpose.

"The dear Rector!" sobbed Miss Clipsby.  
"It is far greater happiness than I hoped for."



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There is no one like him ; I have admired him all my life ; the greatest man I know, and the wisest and the best ; so far above me in every way !"

Eve comprehended, and Miss Clipsby's real humility won her heart. She went over and sat on the sofa and wished her joy most truly.

Dear Miss Clipsby cheered up in a moment and asked Eve how she liked her hat.

When I reproached Eve afterwards for having brought herself to praise such a walking *par-terre*, all she would say was that there were late roses in the garden too.

## CHAPTER XXXV

### EXEUNT

BY the time the first substantial stratum had been laid in trunk and hamper, the winds, out of sheer perversity, had chosen to abate. The tossed and weary garden began to revive under a few days of mist and hazy rain.

All the country about seemed to take on that dress of soft, regretful fairness which places wear before a half-reluctant parting. There were no autumn colourings to be seen, for the salt wind had shaken the life out of the leaves while they were yet green. Still, when a clear blue sky at length appeared, we saw that there was much beauty in the silvery fields, and our own and every other garden in Leysham began to fill afresh with colour.

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Eve, more than any of us, felt the parting. She seemed like a creature who had sent out roots in every direction and could with difficulty bear the plucking up. She went about with a pensive face, bidding her adieus to gentle and simple, far and near. Even Diogenes became undeservedly dear, and I found her one evening fondling his monstrous, woolly ears. I believe if she could have found a basket to fit him, she would have carried him to town along with Polyphemus.

Thomas Matt, too, became an object of affection. We looked regretfully upon his familiar bulk, his roomy garments, his portentous countenance. We knew well nothing like him was to be had in London.

The morning fixed for our going came at last. And, lo and behold, the elements had cheated us, and summer seemed back again. Like a coquette, Leysham had frowned us away, and now that we were going, put on all her most enchanting airs and graces, but too late.

"I could a told ye," said Thomas Matt placidly, as he cut branches of crimson fuchsia for Eve with his pocket cutlass. "I could a told ye. We do get the foinest weather o' the year in October. But there, yew be all too tender made to stand a blow o' wind."

When at last the procession of vehicles arrived that was to carry us away, Eve was ready to cry. She stood with her arms full of roses and late honeysuckle, asters and traveller's joy, and gazed about her. Never did the cottage seem so pleasant; never did the gardens seem more blooming and trim; never was there seen so splendid a sky, so vast and broad and high, so full of mountainous clouds as white as snow, that slowly mounted and descended its arch from north to south. Surely the swallows had made a mistake and gone too soon, and so had we.

But we were the only ones who seemed to think so. An inspiring air of bustle and gaiety sat upon every countenance. Mike and

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Penelope were wild with excitement and dodged in and out under the horses' noses. Popay joyfully hustled her novices. In the perspective of the hall stood the homely form of Mrs. Turt, her head jumping, her bonnet on one side. A deep satisfaction irradiated her face as she pondered our departure. She was restored to her familiar hunting-ground. We knew she would lose no time in setting every picture in the house askew. Mademoiselle, dressed in the most irreproachable travelling costume, was alternately recapturing Penelope and uttering those wonderfully appropriate sentiments so characteristic of the French nation.

"What a happiness," she cried, "that we have such a fine weather to set out ! It is true that the heart squeezes itself when one is separated, but we know well that separations are, alas ! proper to life. One must console oneself. *Tout de même que c'est gai d'être en voyage ! Et voilà mon ami avec les yeux de grenouille qui se console aussi ! Aha, je vois bien !*" etc.



We really had no time to listen to all that mademoiselle had to say. Eve and I were counting the articles that were brought out and stored in the baggage-waggon. Eve had got to thirty-four, while I was only at twenty-eight. So perceiving the futility of the whole proceeding, I put up my note-book and went for a stroll on the grass.

What was my gratification to see that although it was a secular hour and not to be expected, the frieze of villagers had once more appeared, their heads forming a regular row along the wall on either side of the open gate.

As soon as the baggage-cart had passed out the wold venerable appeared in the gateway, and beholding me, took heart of grace and began to zigzag up the drive.

"Well, to be deed!" he cried aloud, as he came on, his forefinger going like clockwork, "that were a pity for yew ta be goin' now and the young pays and cabbidges comin' on so fine. I be vourscore and dree years ole, and I

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never see such a mortal vine sight o' pays in October! That aa didn't! A pity it be to think the frost'll ate 'em all! Tummus Matt, he be a very gud gard'ner, he be; he hev a done wonders. That were a different place when you was a-commen' in äirly June. Lawk, that were a sight! My granfaader, he were a vary fine ole man to work in a garden. . . ."

"Have done now, Agas Goose," said Thomas Matt, with some severity. "Let the master and mistress get into the carriage, man. Your granfaader'll keep till next summer, plaze God!"

Parcel by parcel we were at last mounted into our several equipages and ready to depart. I verily believe every second cottage in the village had sent up bunches of flowers, not counting an enormous bouquet for Eve from Miss Clipsby.

The polished faces of the novices were nodding above variegated bunches screwed up as hard and tight as cauliflowers, Popay's lap

was like an orchard in full bloom, while made-moiselle and the children were smothered under the productions of our own garden. As Eve chose to have in evidence every single flower that had been sent her from the village, our procession had rather the air of a detachment of a floral fête than of a serious family going to catch a train.

The horse attached to our chaise, a flighty chestnut with points and a Roman nose, much admired in the village, proved slightly intractable at starting.

Thereupon Thomas Matt, with infinite precautions and many strange monosyllables, took hold of him by the bridle and led him gingerly down the drive and out of the gate, while the old venerable went skelping along beside him in a manner to recall his ancient prophecy of himself as being "as strong as any harse that do travel the high-road."

As we passed out at the gate we took our last look at the frieze of villagers; they gathered

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into groups, looking after us and nodding their heads together. Even so might their fore-runners have stood and watched the vanishing wheels of the last Roman chariot as it disappeared from amongst them.

In the house-doors as we went by stood the women waving their hands and crying their farewells to us all. They had, most of them, contributed to our decoration, and there is no doubt that our whole effect must have appeared a credit to the village.

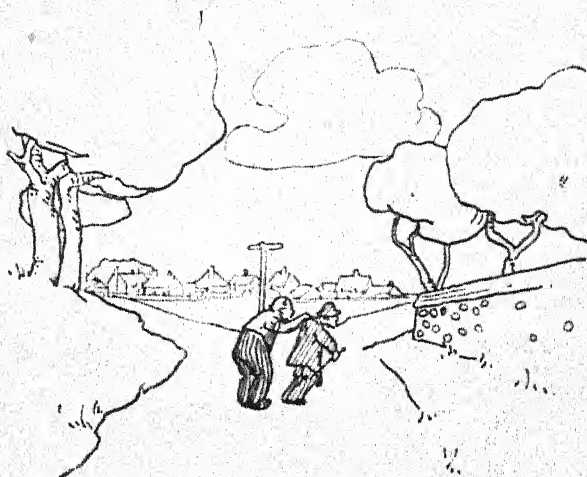
At the turn of the road Thomas Matt loosed the chestnut's bridle, and stood to say farewell.

"Good mornin' t'ye," he said as casually as if we had been going for an hour's drive.

But the old venerable was of a more mercurial temper; moreover, age had loosened his tongue.

"Marnin'," he cried, "and a good journey t'ye. Don't lave the weed to grow, but come again next summer-time and you'll be fine and welcome. . . ."

Here the waggonette moved on, but the old man lifted up his voice accordingly, and his words still reached us.



“Ay, ay! yew be goin’, more’s the pity;  
but ‘Tummus Matt, he’ll take fine care o’ the



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garden. He'll take care o' them pays and cabbidges, I warrant ye! He'll . . ."

At this point Thomas Matt was seen to take hold of the old venerable and shake him in the middle of the road.

Now whatever had Agas Goose been going to say?

THE END

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